



The Cambridge History of Modern France



**Serge Bernstein**

# **THE REPUBLIC OF DE GAULLE 1958-1969**



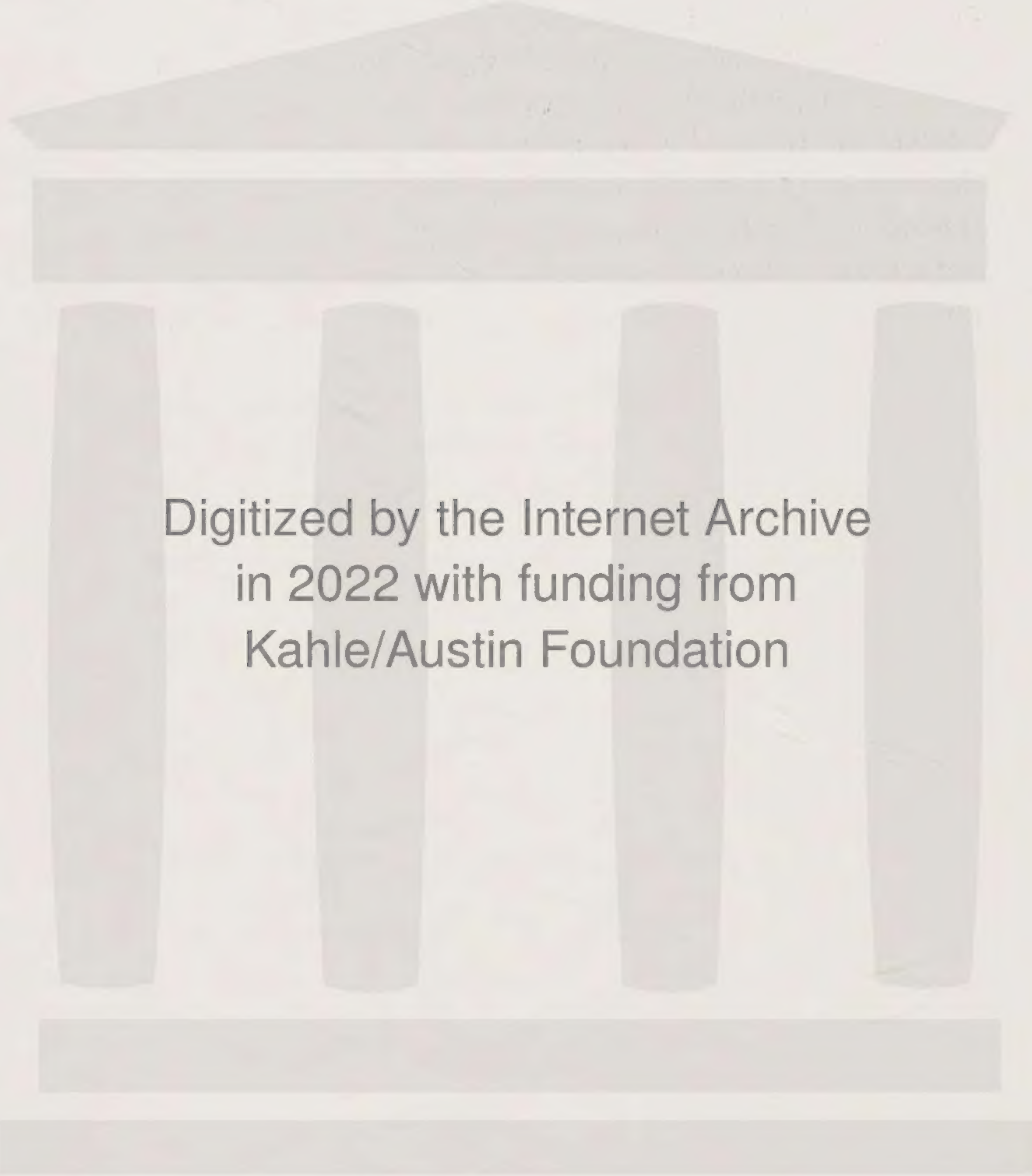
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*The Republic of de Gaulle* offers a comprehensive account – the fullest yet available in English – of the eleven years that followed the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Serge Bernstein analyses the new constitutional and political system that emerged under de Gaulle, and shows how France was able to disengage from the ruinous Algerian war. He then conducts a detailed analysis of the socio-economic changes wrought during this period, and discusses the ambitions, achievements and failures of de Gaulle's highly individualistic foreign policy. In the final section Professor Bernstein traces the decline of de Gaulle's ascendancy, from the election of 1965 to his eventual resignation in 1969. A separate chapter is devoted to the momentous events of 1968, which are located within the overall context of French politics and society during this period. In conclusion, the author assesses the contribution of a remarkable political leader to the no less remarkable changes that took place in France during his presidency.

This volume, the eighth to appear in *The Cambridge History of Modern France*, is lucidly translated by Peter Morris, and is complete with a chronology and English-language bibliography.







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## The Cambridge History of Modern France

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### 8 The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958–1969



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## The Cambridge History of Modern France

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# The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958–1969

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# Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiv
<i>Chronological summary</i>	xvi

## **1 The two foundings of the Fifth Republic**

1	The compromise of 1958	3
	De Gaulle's government	3
	The drawing up of the new institutions	6
	The constitution of 1958	8
	The referendum of 28 September 1958	11
	The party crisis of the early Fifth Republic	18
	The elections of October 1958	20
	The new system takes over	24
2	The problem of Algeria	28
	De Gaulle and Algeria	28
	Stage one: 'a warriors' peace' (June–December 1958)	30
	The affirmation of state authority	33
	Stage two: self-determination (January 1959–June 1962)	36
	Self-determination challenged: French Algeria's	
	supporters say 'no' and the week of the barricades	38
	The disappointments of self-determination: the FLN refusal	43
	Stage three: the Algerian Republic (June 1960–June 1961)	45
	The generals' putsch (22–25 April 1961)	48
	Stage four: negotiation and independence	51
	The tragic end of French Algeria (March–July 1962)	54
3	The political evolution of the regime and the crisis of 1962	58
	The strengthening of presidential power	58



A government under surveillance	60
The decline of parliament	61
Spring 1962: the parties against the regime	64
De Gaulle goes on the attack: the Pompidou government	67
De Gaulle's challenges: Algeria and Europe	70
De Gaulle's third challenge: the election of the president by universal suffrage	71
The 28 October referendum and the victory of the presidential reading of the constitution	74
The elections of November 1962 and the destruction of the traditional parties	78

## **2 Charles de Gaulle and 50 million French people**

4 The institutional and political framework	83
The presidential Republic	84
Ministerial stability?	86
The president's party: from the UNR to UDV <sup>e</sup> .	87
The collapse of the Right	90
Rebuilding the Left: immobilism and change in the Communist Party	92
The crisis of the non-communist Left	93
Attempts to rebuild the non-communist Left	95
The Centre seeks its survival	98
5 The golden age of growth	101
The legacy of the Fourth Republic and the Pinay–Rueff Plan	101
A spectacular and prolonged growth	105
The causes of growth: the role of the state and the internationalising of the economy	106
Explanations of growth: company and product modernisation	108
The results of growth: the relative stagnation of agriculture	110
The fruits of growth: industrial growth	112
The major expansion of the tertiary sector	115
The limits to growth: regional imbalances	116
The limits to growth: the cancer of inflation	117
The limits to growth: the resistance of the old ways	120
The limits to growth: the fragility of overseas trade	123



6	The birth of a consumer society	125
	Economic growth and demographic expansion	125
	Changing demographic patterns	126
	An urban explosion	129
	A revolution in socio-professional structures	132
	The losers: peasant farmers and small employers	133
	Continuities and changes in the working class	135
	The trade union movement: strength and crisis	138
	The ruling class	141
	The golden age of the salaried middle class	144
	Improving living standards and the explosion of consumption	146
	Continuing social inequalities	148
	Social mobility – or rigidity?	151
7	The policy of grandeur: a world design?	153
	The world according to de Gaulle	153
	The end of empire	155
	The rejection of the American protectorate	160
	The refusal of technical and economic subjection	164
	The weapons of grandeur: the nuclear imperative	167
	The means of grandeur: hopes and disappoint- ments in Europe	170
	Successes and disappointments of the Paris–Bonn axis	175
	The global dimension: the Yalta syndrome	177

### **3 The twilight of de Gaulle's Republic**

8	Early symptoms of a waning power	187
	The slow decline of Gaullism in public opinion	188
	The opposition tries a new start: the Defferre candidature	191
	New candidatures and a new political landscape	193
	The electoral campaign and political innovation	196
	The long march to 1967	202
	The 1967 elections: new disappointments for the majority	205
	A darkening political climate	208
9	The crisis of 1968	210
	The student movement as evidence of a crisis of social values	211
	The university powder keg and the explosion of May	212
	The social crisis (13–27 May)	216



	The political crisis (27–31 May)	220
	The June 1968 elections and the consolidation of Gaullism	223
10	Failed recovery and the end of de Gaulle's Republic	227
	The Couve de Murville government	227
	Edgar Faure's university reform	229
	Jean-Marcel Jeanneney's regional reform	231
	France in spring 1969: a coalition of discontents	233
	The end of de Gaulle's Republic	237
	Conclusion: Charles de Gaulle and France's entry into modernity	242
	<i>Bibliography</i>	246
	<i>English-language bibliography</i>	255
	<i>Index</i>	256



# Illustrations

## *Figures*

- |   |                                |                 |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | General de Gaulle's popularity | <i>page</i> 188 |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|

## *Maps*

- |   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | 'Yes' votes in 28 September 1958 referendum         | 16  |
| 2 | 'No' votes in 28 September 1958 referendum          | 17  |
| 3 | Results of 28 October 1962 referendum: 'Yes' votes  | 74  |
| 4 | Results of 28 October 1962 referendum: 'No' votes   | 75  |
| 5 | Results of 28 October 1962 referendum, Paris region | 76  |
| 6 | Votes for de Gaulle, 5 December 1965                | 198 |
| 7 | Votes for Mitterrand, 5 December 1965               | 199 |
| 8 | 'Yes' notes in 27 April 1969 referendum             | 240 |



# Tables

1	Results of the 28 September 1958 referendum	<i>page</i> 15
2	Legislative elections of 23 and 30 November 1958: first round	23
3	Legislative elections of 23 and 30 November 1958: second round	24
4	Legislative elections of 18 and 25 November 1962: first round	79
5	Legislative elections of November 1962: second round	80
6	Average annual growth in gross domestic product, 1959–1970	105
7	French energy consumption in per cent	114
8	Ranking order of the nine major Western exporting nations in 1965 and exports as a percentage of gross domestic product	122
9	Overseas trade balances, 1959 and 1972, in millions of francs	122
10	Annual French population growth, 1962–1969, in thousands	125
11	Number of immigrants in thousands	126
12	Evolution of age distribution as a percentage of the population	126
13	Total active population in thousands	127
14	Numbers in secondary and higher education	128
15	Spatial distribution of the French population	130
16	Evolution of socio-professional categories as a percentage of the active population	133
17	Index of evolution of salaries, 1955–1970	147
18	Share of different types of expenditure in French domestic budgets as a percentage of total expenditure	147
19	Index of inequalities in total household consumption	150
20	Evolution of voting intentions during the first round of the 1965 presidential campaign	197
21	Presidential election of 5 December 1965: first round	200
22	Presidential election of 19 December 1965: second round	200
23	Legislative elections of 5 March 1967: first round	206
24	Legislative elections of 5 and 12 March 1967: outcome in seats	207
25	Legislative elections of 23 June 1968: first round	224
26	Legislative elections of 23 and 30 June 1968: outcome in seats	225



27	Evolution of voting intentions during the campaign for the April 1969 referendum	237
28	27 April 1969 referendum	238
29	Distribution of voting intentions in the 27 April 1969 referendum according to social categories	239



# Abbreviations

CDR	Comité de défense de la république
CES	Collège d'enseignement secondaire
CFDT	Confédération française et démocratique du travail
CFTC	Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens
CGC	Confédération générale des cadres
CGT	Confédération générale du travail
CID-UNATI	Comité d'information et de défense-Union national des artisans et travailleurs indépendants
CNIP	Centre national des indépendants et paysans
CNPF	Conseil national du patronat français
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRS	Compagnies républicaines de sécurité
EDC	European Defence Community
EDF-GDF	Electricité de France-Gaz de France
ENA	Ecole nationale d'administration
ESSEC	Ecole supérieure des sciences économiques et commerciales
FAF	Front de l'Algérie française
FEN	Fédération de l'éducation nationale
FGDS	Fédération de la gauche démocratique et socialiste
FLN	Front de libération nationale
FNSEA	Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles
FO	Force ouvrière
GPRA	Gouvernement provisoire de la République Algérienne
HEC	Hautes études commerciales
IFOP	Institut français de l'opinion publique
INSEE	Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques
JCR	Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire



MRP	Mouvement républicain populaire
OAS	Organisation armée secrète
ORTF	Office de la radio télédiffusion française
PCF	Parti communiste français
PSA	Parti socialiste autonome
PSU	Parti socialiste unifié
RATP	Régie autonome des transports parisiens
RGR	Rassemblement des gauches républicaines
RPF	Rassemblement du peuple français
SFIO	Section française de l'internationale ouvrière
SMIC	Salaire minimum interprofessionelle de croissance
SMIG	Salaire minimum interprofessionelle garanti
SNCF	Société nationale des chemins de fer
UDR	Union des démocrates pour la république
UDSR	Union démocratique et socialiste de la résistance
UDT	Union démocratique du travail
UDV <sup>c</sup>	Union des démocrates pour la Cinquième République
UEC	Union des étudiants communistes
UFD	Union des forces démocratiques
UNEF	Union nationale des étudiants de France
UNR	Union pour la nouvelle république



# Chronological summary

## 1958

- 2 June* Vote of full powers to General de Gaulle
- 4–7 June* De Gaulle visits Algeria
- 1–5 July* De Gaulle's second visit to Algeria
- 4 September* De Gaulle presents the new constitution at the Place de la République
- 24 September* Memorandum on the tripartite directory for NATO
- 28 September* Referendum on the adoption of the constitution
- 23 October* De Gaulle offers 'a warriors' peace'. Creation of the UNR
- 23–30 November* Legislative elections: progress of the UNR
- 9 December* J. Chaban-Delmas elected president of the National Assembly
- 21 December* De Gaulle elected President of the Republic and of the community
- 28 December* Devaluation of the franc and the creation of the 'new franc'

## 1959

- 6 January* Ordinance raising school leaving age to sixteen
- 8 January* De Gaulle assumes presidency of the Fifth Republic
- 9 January* Formation of the Debré ministry
- March* French fleet withdraws from NATO
- 8–15 March* Municipal elections; progress of the communists
- 14 April* Creation of the UDT (left-wing Gaullists)
- 26 April* Senate elections favourable to the opposition
- 19 June* Seizure of the book *La Gangrène* denouncing torture in Algeria
- 16 September* General de Gaulle's speech on self-determination for Algeria
- 19 September* Georges Bidault and Roger Duchet call a rally in Paris for French Algeria
- 15 October* Attack on François Mitterrand in the avenue de l'Observatoire
- November* The Senate votes to lift the parliamentary immunity of François Mitterrand, accused of having set up the 15 October attack



- 2 December Civil Service strike. The Malpasset dam bursts resulting in 200 deaths in the Fréjus area
- 23–24 December Legislation introducing contractual status for private education voted on. Resignation of the Minister for National Education, André Boulloche

**1960**

- 13 January A. Pinay resigns from government and is replaced by Wilfrid Baumgartner
- 19 January General Massu is relieved of his duties in Algiers
- 24 January–1 February The barricades week in Algiers
- February Agricultural unrest in several regions
- 2 February Law allowing the government to issue decrees passed
- 5 February Ministerial reshuffle ousting the French Algeria partisans Soustelle and Cornut-Gentile
- 13 February Explosion of the atomic bomb at Reggane
- 3–7 March General de Gaulle's 'tour of the officers' messes' in Algeria
- 15–17 March General de Gaulle's refusal to summon an extraordinary session of the National Assembly, despite the demand of 300 parliamentarians, to discuss agricultural problems
- 23 March–3 April Nikita Khrushchev visits France
- 3 April Creation of the United Socialist Party (PSU)
- 25 April Jacques Soustelle excluded from the UNR
- 19 May–July Vote of the farming law
- 14 June De Gaulle's speech reaffirming his Algerian policy
- 25–29 June Melun negotiations with the FLN
- 5 September De Gaulle's press conference on Algeria. Start of the trial of the Jeanson network supporting the FLN. Publication of the 'Declaration of the 121' on the right of insubordination
- 6 October Manifesto of the pro-French Algeria intellectuals
- 7 October Trade union demonstration for peace in Algeria
- 4 November Televised speech by General de Gaulle evoking 'Algeria for the Algerians' and announcing a referendum on 8 January 1961 on self-determination
- 10–13 November De Gaulle visits Algeria. Demonstrations by the two communities for and against Algerian independence
- January–July Independence granted to French African countries and to Madagascar

**1961**

- 8 January Referendum on self-determination
- 20 February Meeting of de Gaulle and Bourguiba
- 23 February Marcel Servin and Laurent Casanova lose their posts in the Communist Party
- 2 March Acquittal of those prosecuted for barricades week



- 22–25 April Generals' putsch in Algiers
- 15 May Publication of the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*
- 31 May–2 June President Kennedy visits France
- June Rural agitation, especially in Brittany
- 20 June Lugrin negotiation with the FLN
- July Incidents at Bizerta
- 24 August Edgard Pisani appointed Minister of Agriculture
- 8 September Attack on de Gaulle at Pont-sur-Seine
- 17 October Violent repression of Muslim demonstrations in Paris

## 1962

- January Multiple attacks by the OAS on the mainland
- 18 January Valéry Giscard d'Estaing replaces W. Baumgartner as Minister of Finance
- 8 February Anti-OAS demonstration in Paris. Eight killed at the Charonne métro station
- 13 February Massive demonstration during the funerals of those killed in the Charonne métro station
- 19 March Cease-fire in Algeria after the signing of the Evian Agreement the previous day
- 23 March Riots in Bab el-Oued: twenty dead
- 26 March Demonstration and shooting in rue d'Isly, Algiers
- 8 April Referendum on the approval of the Evian Agreement
- 14 April Georges Pompidou replaces Michel Debré as prime minister
- 11–13 April General Jouhaud is sentenced to death
- 20 April Arrest of General Salan
- 15 May Press conference in which General de Gaulle rejects European integration. MRP ministers resign
- 15–23 May Trial of General Salan who is sentenced to life imprisonment
- 27 May Abolition of high military tribunal
- 30 May Creation of the court of military justice
- 1 July Algeria gains independence
- 22 August Attack on General de Gaulle at Petit-Clamart
- 12 September General de Gaulle announces a referendum on the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage
- 5 October The National Assembly votes to censure Pompidou's government
- 10 October Dissolution of the National Assembly
- 23 October Cuban missile crisis reaches its climax
- 28 October Referendum on the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage
- 18–25 November Legislative elections
- 7 December Reshuffle of Pompidou's government
- 29 December Company agreement at Renault: four weeks' paid holiday

## 1963

- 3–4 January Creation of the state security court



- 14 January De Gaulle vetoes Britain's candidature for the Common Market
- 22 January Signature of the Franco-German treaty of co-operation
- 5 March–April Miners' strike
- April Crisis in the Union of Communist Students (UEC)
- 3 June Death of Pope John XXIII
- 22 June Night of 'Salut les copains', Place de la Nation
- June France's Atlantic and Channel naval forces withdraw from NATO
- July Law regulating the right to strike in the public sector
- 3 August Decree creating colleges of secondary education (CES)
- 12 September Implementation of the Stabilisation Plan
- 15 September 'Banquet of the thousand' to prepare the reorganisation of the opposition
- October *L'Express* inaugurates the presidential campaign with the 'Monsieur X' (Defferre) operation
- 27 November Demonstrations against the nuclear strike force

**1964**

- 27 January Recognition of Communist China
- 1–2 February The SFIO Congress ratifies the Defferre candidature for the presidency of the Republic
- 5 February Toutée Report
- 8–15 April Cantonal elections favour the Left
- 7–10 May MRP Congress
- 14–17 May PCF Congress: Waldeck Rochet as secretary general
- May Vote of the ORTF Statute
- 7 June Creation of the Convention of Republican Institutions
- 12 July Death of Maurice Thorez
- October The Gregoire Commissions on public sector salaries start to meet
- 6–7 November Extraordinary congress of the CFTC which becomes the CFDT. A minority remains with the CFTC
- 11 December Public sector general strike

**1965**

- 14–21 March Municipal elections favourable to the opposition
- 25–26 March Crisis at the UEC after being taken in hand by the PCF
- 25 April P. Marcilhacy candidature for the presidency
- 8 May G. Defferre proposes a federation of the democratic and socialist Left
- 17–18 June Failure of the federation project
- 1 July France practises the politics of the 'empty seat' at Brussels
- 9 September François Mitterrand announces his candidature for the presidency
- 10 September Creation of the democratic and socialist federation of the Left (FGDS)



- 26 September Senate elections
- 26 October Jean Lecanuet announces his candidature for the presidency
- 29 October Abduction of the Moroccan leader Ben Barka
- 4 November General de Gaulle announces his candidature for the presidency
- 5–19 December Presidential election

**1966**

- 5 January Reshuffle of Pompidou's government
- 7 January Decree creating university institutes of technology
- 2 February Creation of the democratic Centre
- February The independent republicans distance themselves from the UNR
- 4 March France withdraws from the integrated command structure of NATO
- 12–13 March Announcement of the team to set up a 'counter government'
- 15–17 March Higher education strike against the Fouchet project
- 30 April–1 May Grenoble colloquium
- May Creation of the counter government
- June De Gaulle visits the USSR
- 22 June Fouchet reform of higher education
- 1 September Phnom Penh speech
- 14–15 November Caen colloquium on higher education and research
- December Electoral agreement between the PCF and FGDS for the 1967 parliamentary elections
- 20 December Demonstration by Breton poultry farmers at Morlaix

**1967**

- 10 January Giscard d'Estaing's press conference: 'Yes, but'
- 22 February Pompidou–Mitterrand debate at Nevers
- 27 February Pompidou–Mendès France debate at Grenoble
- 5–12 March Legislative elections
- 13 April Introduction of Computer Plan
- 26 April Council of ministers asks parliament for a vote permitting legislation by ordinance. Edgar Pisani resigns
- 17 May General strike and demonstration against the vote of special powers
- 5–10 June Six Day War
- 11–16 June CGT congress. Georges Séguy replaces Benoît Frachon as general secretary
- 13 July Creation of National Employment Agency
- 26 July De Gaulle visits Montreal: 'Long live free Quebec'
- 17 August Ordinance on wage-earners sharing in company profits
- 22 August Ordinances and decrees reforming the social security system
- 24 September–1 October Cantonal elections



- October* Widespread strikes and demonstrations
- 23 November* Giscard d'Estaing, president of the National Assembly finance commission, abstains on the vote in the budget
- 19 December* Vote of the Neuwirth law authorising contraception

**1968**

- January* Agitation in the *lycées* and disturbances at the Faculty of Nanterre
- February* Demonstrations against the Vietnam War; worker and student demonstrations
- 22 March* Occupation of the council chamber of the Arts Faculty at Nanterre
- April* Continuing agitation in the universities
- 2 May* Pompidou leaves for Afghanistan
- 3 May* Fighting starts in the Latin Quarter. Beginning of the 'student phase' of the May Events
- 10–11 May* Night of the barricades
- 13 May* Students and trade unionists march from Place de la République to Denfert-Rochereau
- 14–18 May* Official visit of de Gaulle to Romania
- 20 May* The number of strikers reaches ten million
- 25–27 May* Negotiation of the Grenelle Agreements
- 27 May* Meeting at the Charlety stadium
- 28 May* Mitterrand demands the formation of a provisional government
- 29 May* 'Disappearance' of General de Gaulle
- 30 May* Speech by General de Gaulle. March by the Gaullists to the Champs Elysées
- 1 June* Reshuffle of the Pompidou government
- 14–16 June* The Sorbonne and Odéon theatre are evacuated
- 23–30 June* Legislative elections
- 10 July* Maurice Couve de Murville replaces Pompidou as prime minister
- 21 July* Warsaw Pact troops enter Czechoslovakia
- 12 November* Final vote of the orientation law on higher education
- 23 November* General de Gaulle refuses to devalue the franc
- 5 December* Law on trade union rights in factories
- 27 December* Dijon CDR attacks the policies of Edgar Faure

**1969**

- 17 January* Pompidou reveals at Rome that he will be a candidate should a presidential election take place
- 22 January* Elysée communiqué affirming de Gaulle's intention to complete his mandate
- 3 February* Alain Poher rejects the proposals for Senate reform
- March–April* Campaign for and against the Jeanneney reform
- 27 April* Victory for the 'no' vote in the referendum
- 28 April* Resignation of General de Gaulle







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Part 1

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**The two foundings of the  
Fifth Republic**







## The compromise of 1958

To contemporaries, the conditions in which the Fifth Republic came into being contrasted very favourably with those of 1946 when its predecessor was created. The new Republic gave striking proof of its efficiency. Whereas two constituent assemblies and twelve months' discussion had been needed to found the Fourth Republic, it took de Gaulle's government barely three months, from the date the National Assembly entrusted it with the task, to adopt a text, and the new institutions were ready to come into operation by the end of 1958 as had been promised. Yet the new Republic, despite reflecting de Gaulle's ability to gain acceptance for the ideas spelled out in his 1946 Bayeux programme, also bore the marks of the compromise which the political realities of the time had required him to accept. It was the pressure of circumstances, and in particular the Algerian war, that caused the initial evolution of institutional practice followed, in the constitutional reform of 1962, by a radical restructuring of institutional principle.

### *De Gaulle's government*

For those who remembered the debates which marked the history of the Fourth Republic, the new political situation that came into being in early June 1958 must have seemed remarkable. In the transition period that lasted until January 1959, de Gaulle, the relentless critic of the 'system' of the Fourth Republic, found himself its prime minister, invested in conditions of perfect legality by the National Assembly on 1 June by 329 votes to 224. The institutions of the Fourth Republic remained in place, and President Coty saw out in the solitude of the Elysée a *septennat* (seven-year term) that had begun four years earlier and was to end – with his agreement – on the election of the first president of the Fifth Republic. Meanwhile the National Assembly, elected in January 1956 and the corner-stone of the doomed regime, lived a shadowy life in permanent recess; it had accepted, in June, its own exclusion from affairs. For it was only the title of prime minister that made Charles de Gaulle the successor of Henri Queuille, Joseph Laniel or Guy Mollet. The three laws that were



voted on 2 June and promulgated the next day gave the new prime minister resources that none of his predecessors would have dared dream of: alongside the special powers for Algeria which prime ministers had enjoyed since 1956, de Gaulle was granted full powers for a six-month period (the time he felt he needed to realise his new institutional structure), and a constitutional law modified the revision procedures laid out in article 90 of the 1946 constitution by granting the government power to draw up a project which would then be submitted to a referendum. De Gaulle's ministry respected the legal forms of a government of the Fourth Republic; but it did not in any sense respect the spirit of a regime whose defining characteristic was the pre-eminence of parliament.

The same distinction between form and substance characterised the composition of the government. On the surface it looked as if de Gaulle showed scrupulous respect for the sharing-out of posts and the balance of parties for which he had, until recently, expressed such ostentatious disdain. The evidence is plain. Four ministers of state represented the principal political forces within the National Assembly (the communists, of course, being excluded) – the socialist Guy Mollet, the MRP Pierre Pflimlin, the independent Jacquinet and, in the absence of a radical (for the party had split into at least three factions), a cousin of the family in the person of the Ivory Coast leader Félix Houphouët-Boigny, president of the African Democratic Rally (RDA) that was linked to the UDSR. The same concern to reassure the parties was evident in the distribution of portfolios, with each group receiving the sector to which it was traditionally linked. Antoine Pinay, the leader of the moderates and idol of the small saver, went to the Finance Ministry, while the radical Berthoin, the champion of *laïcité*, was given Education, and the social concerns of the MRP were acknowledged by the presence of Paul Bacon at the Ministry of Labour. Even the absences were significant. Only Gaullists figured in the ministerial team. Michel Debré, a senator who in the Fourth Republic had edited a violently anti-regime journal, the *Courrier de la colère*, became Minister of Justice with specific responsibility for drawing up the new constitution; the distinguished writer André Malraux was Minister of Information; and the ultra-loyal Edmond Michelet took over the Ex-Servicemen's portfolio. De Gaulle could not have signalled more clearly that his coming to power was not the victory of the 'social republicans' who had supported him in the Fourth Republic. Indeed all their leaders – Gaston Palewski and Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Christian Fouchet and General Catroux, General Koenig and General Billotte – were excluded from government, thereby paying the price for their participation in the 'system'. But the most noteworthy absence was that of Jacques Soustelle, who was regarded as the parliamentary leader of the Gaullists and also as the leader of the pro-French Algeria forces; his exclusion was all the more significant given that



the crowds of European demonstrators endlessly chanted his name during de Gaulle's visit of 4–6 June to the three trans-Mediterranean *départements*. It was not until 7 July that Soustelle entered the government as Minister of Information (thereby replacing Malraux), and even then de Gaulle balanced this choice of a French Algeria militant with that of the socialist Boulloche, who became minister delegate to the prime minister's office.

This traditional interpretation of the de Gaulle government, though undeniably accurate, is also very superficial. For the reality of government power lay elsewhere and, to begin with, in the appointment to those posts which de Gaulle regarded as essential to the life of the state not of political figures, but of technicians whose role was to put into effect the prime minister's policy decisions. Thus the diplomat Maurice Couve de Murville became Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Seine prefect Pelletier took over the Interior and the *polytechnique* graduate Pierre Guillaumat, hitherto responsible for atomic research, was appointed Minister of the Armed Forces under the overall authority of de Gaulle, who reserved for himself the portfolio of National Defence. Even more significant was the organisation at the Hôtel Matignon (the prime minister's official residence) of a private office, composed of reliable mandarins and Gaullist loyalists, which often seemed to be the real government of France, making decisions which the ministers assembled at the Elysée simply ratified. At the head of this hidden ministry was Georges Pompidou, who brought together the team which had kept the Gaullist flame alive in the rue de Solferino during the 'crossing the desert' years first with the RPF and then with the social republicans – Olivier Guichard, Pierre Lefranc, Jacques Foccart. De Gaulle viewed such people occupying governmental offices with some irritation so great was his fear that party activism would spill over into the service of the state. Yet, on the other hand, he was wholly content to fill his private office with senior civil servants to act as advisers in the areas of prime importance and plan out the measures that would found the new regime. Raymond Janot, general secretary of the Conseil d'Etat, acted for de Gaulle on constitutional matters; Roger Goetze, an inspector of finances who had been Mendès France's collaborator in 1944–5, was given the task of drawing up a recovery plan for France's public finances; Jean-Marc Boegner was technical adviser for foreign affairs; and the historian Charles Morazé took charge of a 'think tank'. General Fourquet was one of a number of serving officers employed, and a secretariat for Algerian Affairs was established at the rue de Lille, under the direction of René Brouillet with the collaboration of Bernard Tricot.

This two-tier government had to deal with an enormous agenda, since its goal was nothing less than providing France with a new constitution while simultaneously coping with problems whose urgency would not allow for any delay – Algeria; the future of the French empire (an issue with



direct institutional implications); international relations which would not conveniently go away while the constitution was being drawn up; financial recovery, and so on. That the government had to deal with the whole range of problems during its short period of existence makes it one of the most productive ministries in French political history. Yet its fundamental achievement, over and above the imperatives of the immediate situation, remains the creation of new institutions.

### *The drawing up of the new institutions*

The speed with which the institutions of the Fifth Republic were drawn up is certainly remarkable; but we must remember that the basic issues involved were far from new, and that the discussion of constitutional reform had never been absent from the preoccupations of the politicians of the collapsing Fourth Republic. The founding principles had been enunciated at Bayeux on 16 June 1946 and formed part of the core doctrine of Gaullism: separation of powers and the strengthening of the executive through the new role of the president of the republic, who thus became the corner-stone of the whole constitutional edifice. Onto this fundamental principle were grafted the various projects constructed during the Fourth Republic to 'rationalise parliamentarism', projects on which the leaders of the dying regime had worked. It is not without significance that Guy Mollet and Pierre Pflimlin, who were now ministers of state, had induced the Assembly to vote for a reform of this type on 27 May 1958. To these various sources must finally be added the undertakings that General de Gaulle had given both during his May negotiations with the leaders of the political parties (and in particular Guy Mollet), and in his replies to questions raised in the National Assembly on 2 June during the debate on the full powers law: the preservation of a parliamentary system and the rejection of a presidential regime, and thus the separation of the functions of prime minister and president, and the guarantee of a Chamber elected by universal suffrage.

Such were the bases on which the new constitution was elaborated, through a complicated procedure involving numerous actors. The most important was de Gaulle himself who, though faced with the urgency of Algeria, foreign affairs and financial questions, refused to leave to others the responsibility for preparing a text on a theme whose urgent necessity he had constantly proclaimed since 1946. He would write in his *Memoirs of Hope*: 'I directed the work of institutional reform.' Second in importance was the Hôtel Matignon team, composed of the four ministers of state (Mollet, Pflimlin, Houphouët-Boigny and Jacquinot) who represented the major political parties, and balanced by two jurists who represented General de Gaulle, the faithful René Cassin, vice-president of the Council of



State, and Raymond Janot. This team held its meetings in de Gaulle's office and played a fundamental role in initiation and amendment. The third circle – grouped around the Minister of Justice, Michel Debré, and composed of members of the Council of State and of law specialists representing the ministers of state – drew up the texts which the Hôtel Matignon then discussed. In general the desire of Debré's group to emphasise the pre-eminence of the executive found itself, as a result of de Gaulle's arbitration, softened and balanced by the determination of the ministers of state to preserve the parliamentary form of the regime, an attitude that was supported, it must be said, by both the Minister of Justice and the prime minister. Begun on 19 June, the work of the ministerial teams progressed quickly, and resulted a month later in a first draft (the 'red book') setting out the guiding principles on which agreement would be reached.

At this stage in the preparation of the constitution a further body, the Constitutional Consultative Committee, intervened. This committee was the result of the 2 June text modifying the procedure for revision, a text which specified that the government must receive the formal advice of a consultative body in which an important place would be reserved for members of parliament nominated by the relevant commissions of the National Assembly and the Council of State. Established on 2 July, the Constitutional Consultative Committee had thirty-nine members, sixteen of whom came from the National Assembly (among them Paul Alduy, Philibert Tsiranana, Pierre-Henri Teitgen, Paul Coste-Floret), ten from the Council of State, and thirteen from government nomination, including Roger Frey, the ambassador Léon Noël and Paul Reynaud. The latter, an octogenarian, became, by virtue of his age, president of the committee. Between 29 July and 14 August, this assembly of jurists and experienced parliamentarians submitted the 'red book' to a minute scrutiny that infuriated the Gaullist Léon Noël. The latter fulminated against what he regarded as a return to the sort of parliamentary games that proved the 'noxiousness of the regime that had collapsed in May' and which had no place in a forum that he considered should be wholly dedicated to the construction of a new regime. In reality the principal debates focused on the incompatibility of ministerial office and parliamentary mandate (which the committee tried in vain to abolish); on the composition of the electoral college charged with choosing the president of the Republic; on article 14 (which would become article 16) of the constitution that enabled the head of state to take 'the measures which the circumstances required' whenever a grave crisis threatened the nation; and on the future structure of the proposed Community. On 8 August, de Gaulle visited the committee, where he offered reassurance to the various parties and replied to questions but gave no ground on what he regarded as the essential issues. Considering that parliamentary opinion had had ample opportunity to express



itself, he then submitted the text to the council of ministers on 3 September 1958. The council gave its approval, though not without a few reservations on the part of President Coty who played his last political role on that day.

In its essentials the final text clearly reflected the views which de Gaulle had hammered home over the preceding twelve years. This was certainly the judgement advanced in his *Memoirs of Hope*. 'What had to be done was basically that which is known as the Constitution of Bayeux since it was there, on 16 June 1946, that I had laid down the route that France needed to take.' In claiming this de Gaulle was undoubtedly correct, and it needs to be stressed that in the post-13 May trauma, when the whole of France was convinced that, as Jacques Fauvet wrote in *Le Monde*, 'the Republic had only one defence between itself and Fascism and that was the physical person of General de Gaulle', no one sought to stand up against his judgement. Yet it remains the case that de Gaulle did take account of the opinions of jurists and parliamentarians, that he showed surprisingly good grace in coming to terms with the forces that he had combated, and that Guy Mollet was entitled to regard himself as one of the 'fathers' of the new constitution, even if he was soon to be disillusioned with his progeny. The text that de Gaulle submitted to the country in the early days of September 1958 bore all the hallmarks of a compromise.

### *The constitution of 1958*

The constitution begins with a number of simple ideas articulated by de Gaulle or by the representatives of those political forces whom he had involved in its preparation: the separation of powers (here clearly meaning the end of the subordination of the executive power to the whim of the Assembly); and the maintenance of a parliamentary regime (meaning a government that would remain responsible to the Assembly). These two principles were not by definition incompatible, but they could have very different consequences. If the emphasis was laid on the first, the result could well be an American-type presidential system in which power resided in the executive. Yet the Bayeux speech had ruled out this solution, and so indeed did the undertakings given on 2 June and the promise to draw a distinction between president and accountable prime minister. But if the second principle were to triumph, the outcome would be a regime similar to the Third and Fourth Republics, and this was something that de Gaulle was determined to avoid. Thus the logic of the new regime resided in an ambiguous, half-way system which constitutionalists baptised a 'regenerated parliamentary regime', but whose working practices would perplex the theoreticians of parliamentary government.

What struck contemporaries and appeared to be fundamental was the new importance accorded in the institutions to the president of the



Republic. It was immediately significant that the presidency was defined in the second chapter of the constitution, straight after the definition of sovereignty – in the 1946 constitution it had been dealt with only in section six. Though expressed with more force than previously, the definition of its role differed little from the tradition of the Third and Fourth Republics: guarantor of the continuity of the state, of national independence and territorial integrity, the president was responsible for ensuring the respect of the constitution and, through his arbitration, the proper functioning of public powers. The real innovation resided less in the enumeration of his functions than in the mechanism for his appointment and the resources he was given to enable him to carry out his tasks. General de Gaulle was determined that the president should be free from the pressure of parliament; and to ensure this the latter would no longer choose the former. Thus, in line with his Bayeux proposals, he included in the new constitution a provision that the president should be selected by an electoral college in which the members of Parliament would certainly be present, but where they would be submerged by a mass of departmental councillors, representatives of the assemblies of overseas territories, mayors and their deputies, and delegates of municipal councils – in total some 80,000 *notables* resembling the delegates used to elect the Senate.

Chosen by these local notables, the president of the Republic had far greater resources than his predecessors with which to fulfil the role assigned to him by the constitution. It is true that the nomination of the prime minister and, on the latter's proposal, of the other members of the government (article 8), the chairmanship of the council of ministers (article 9) and the promulgation of laws (article 10) all formed part of the traditional prerogatives of the head of state. But there were three constitutional innovations. Article 11 enabled the president, on the proposition of the government or the two assemblies, to submit to a referendum any bill dealing with the organisation of public powers, and thus gave him the means to address the country directly. Article 12 enabled him, after consultation with the prime minister and the president of the two assemblies, to dissolve the National Assembly. Finally, article 16 granted him exceptional powers when the institutions of the Republic, the independence of the nation, the integrity of its territory or the fulfilment of its international obligations were threatened. (The reference to May 1940 is clear.) It is obvious that the powers of the president of the Fifth Republic were quite different from those of his predecessors in the parliamentary Republics. The presidency was indeed that corner-stone which de Gaulle had described at Bayeux.

The gain in power for the executive was balanced by parliament's loss of resources and influence since it was to put an end to parliamentary omnipotence that de Gaulle had fought for the 'separation of powers'.



Composed, as in the preceding Republics, of two chambers, parliament had its role reduced by the constitutional texts even before constitutional practice weakened it still further. The National Assembly was elected for five years by universal suffrage and found itself limited to legislative and budgetary functions; its powers of initiative were reduced, and its ability to control government strictly supervised. Deputies were no longer allowed to introduce measures reducing public resources or increasing public expenditure. The procedure of interpellations was abolished. A government could henceforth be defeated only if a vote of censure received an absolute majority, or if a (similarly absolute) majority refused to support a confidence motion put forward by the government. Finally, the National Assembly controlled neither the dates of its sessions (which were laid down in article 28 of the constitution), nor its timetable, which was effectively determined by the government.

The second chamber reverted to its Third Republic name of Senate. But it did not regain the eminent status it had enjoyed before 1940, even though it is fair to say that a certain strengthening of its position relative to that in the Fourth Republic did take place. Through indirect suffrage in departmental colleges comprising deputies, departmental councillors and representatives of municipal councils, the senators were elected for nine years, with one third of the Senate being renewed every three years. Article 45 of the constitution gave it a very limited role in the legislative process. Where disagreements occurred between it and the National Assembly, bills passed twice between the two chambers in a procedure called the *navette*. If no agreement was reached, a joint commission attempted to establish a common text; in case of failure, the ultimate decision rested with the National Assembly. Yet, in the circumstances of a vacancy in the presidency, it was the president of the Republic who acted as caretaker.

A good idea of the relative political clout of president and parliament can be gained by studying the position of the government, which was at the crossroads of the two institutional powers since it was appointed by the president but responsible to the National Assembly. Its attributes were crucial, with article 20 stating that it 'determines and carries out the policy of the nation'. There was nothing in the texts to stop a prime minister, supported by a majority of the National Assembly, using his constitutional authority to impose a policy opposed by the head of state. This possibility of a two-headed power, of a dyarchy was (and is) a constant risk in the constitutional settlement of the Fifth Republic given its juxtaposition of a parliamentary regime and a presidential pre-eminence that owes more to principles than to the written text. In this respect the constitution appeared susceptible to differing interpretations depending on the power relationships that existed at any moment between head of state and parliamentary



majority. Given the circumstances of 1958, however, such a hypothesis looked to be narrowly academic. Moreover, the clause (article 23) which prevented the cumulation of ministerial office and a parliamentary mandate was designed to loosen the links between parliament and government. And in the last analysis, it was de Gaulle's actions between 1958 and 1962 that were to determine the issue of whether government derived its existence from parliament or president.

The constitution of the Fifth Republic also contained an innovation, of whose significance contemporaries were not fully aware. It created a constitutional council, modelled on the United States Supreme Court, responsible for supervising the correct functioning of elections (and in the first place that of the president of the Republic), and for supervising the constitutionality of laws. The council had nine members, appointed for nine years, with one third renewable every three years. The president of the Republic appointed three of the members, as did the presidents of the two assemblies. The council's existence testified to the determination of the constitution framers to place their creation above controversy and political conflict and to inscribe in marble a set of procedures that would last, if not for ever (French constitutional history did not allow for any such illusions), then at least for a long period.

There still remained the task of persuading the French people to accept the text in the referendum which had been promised on 2 June. This was an electoral test of the utmost significance. A 'no' vote would have consigned de Gaulle's project to oblivion, whereas baptism by universal suffrage would give the unchallengeable unction of democratic legitimacy to a proposal that until now rested solely on the historical legitimacy that de Gaulle enjoyed, and the dubious opportunity that had been offered by 13 May.

### *The referendum of 28 September 1958*

On 4 September in the Place de la République, General de Gaulle presented to the French nation the constitutional document which the council of ministers had adopted the day before. The people were to make their decision on 28 September. To respond to the accusation of Bonapartism which the extreme Left had made against de Gaulle ever since 13 May, the whole repertoire of republican symbolism was brought into play: the date was the anniversary of the proclamation of the Third Republic by the republican deputies of Paris in 1870, and the place was one dedicated to the regime and ornamented since 1883 by the monument to the Republic (whose artistic mediocrity should not obscure the interest of Dalou's bronze bas-reliefs which surround the base and portray the struggles of the Republic). The speakers' podium was decorated with the



insignia 'RF' ('République française') and security was provided by members of the Garde républicaine in full dress uniform. Two speakers prepared the way for de Gaulle. The radical Minister of Education, Berthoin, summoned up all the glories of the Republic – Gambetta, Clemenceau, Jaurès, Lyautey – in an ecumenical discourse, while André Malraux, at his most visionary, pronounced a lyrical oration that sent a historical *frisson* over his audience. Finally de Gaulle appeared, uniting the past with the present and locating the Fifth Republic – gigantic 'V's decorated the site – in the great tradition of a regime which had not experienced such exaltation since 14 July 1880. Yet politics was not ignored either as de Gaulle first proclaimed the merits of the constitutional text and then in conclusion stated bluntly that only a 'yes' vote would make the Republic worthy of its predecessors and that a 'no' vote would return France to the 'evil ways that you all know'. (The latter hypothesis was incidentally purely academic.) Opposition to the 'yes' vote, organised by the Communist Party, was kept at a safe distance by an aggressive security service and had little success in carrying its message through to the Place de la République.

The election campaign which began the day after the 4 September ceremonies simply accentuated the existing trend in favour of a positive vote. A public opinion poll taken before the ballot showed that 15.5 per cent of the electorate claimed to have read the whole text on which they were to decide, whereas 34.5 per cent had read only bits of it, and 49.5 per cent had not studied it at all. But when asked whether they approved or disapproved of the proposal, 56 per cent chose the former and only 6.5 per cent the latter. It was clear that the sheer number of those approving and the weakness of the opposition owed little to the supposed virtues or failings of the text on which the French were going to vote. For among the reasons given to explain voting intentions, pride of place went to the idea that the text would create 'strong government', followed by the belief that it would bring about change and, finally, that it was the work of de Gaulle. A further poll on voting intentions confirmed these findings, indicating that the strong surge in the 'yes' camp between the beginning and the end of September was due to four related factors: anti-parliamentarism (linked to the desire for strong government and for change), confidence in General de Gaulle, the fear of civil war which only he could avoid, and the fear of a left-wing dictatorship. On the other hand, it is true that the strongest motive of the 'no' camp was the fear of a right-wing dictatorship following the adoption of the constitution.

The political parties themselves were obliged to define their own position in the context of a public opinion generally favourable to the 'yes' cause. But in fact they did not really have a choice. With the exception of the Communist Party, none of the major organised parties were in a position to oppose the constitution for two reasons: they had helped to draw it up, and



they were so internally divided (a point to which we shall return) that they were unable to go against majority public opinion. Hence they all declared in favour of a 'yes' vote. In the case of the social republicans, the independents and the MRP (where de Gaulle's supporters remained numerous despite all the Fourth Republic squabbles), there was nothing surprising about this. By contrast, things were much less obvious on the Left. All the factions of a radicalism that had split into three during the bitter struggles of 1955–6 chose the 'yes' camp. This was to be expected from the Rassemblement des gauches républicaines whose leader, Edgar Faure, had urged the recall of de Gaulle on 17 April, and from the Centre républicain of Henri Queuille, André Morice and their supporters. But the official Radical Party, in deciding by 716 votes to 544 to choose the 'yes' camp, turned its back on its two principal influences of the period, Pierre Mendès France and Jean Baylet (director of the powerful *Dépêche du Midi*), both of whom advocated rejection. The party also decided on a new start by electing as its president Félix Gaillard, the representative of a new generation of radicals, a man of moderation and compromise, more interested in economic questions than in ideological struggles. The 'yes' choice was also made by the Socialist Party, despite the vehement opposition of a determined minority which felt itself closer to Mendès France than to the party's general secretary Guy Mollet, who had broken with Mendès France over his Algerian policy in 1956–7, and which regarded de Gaulle as the man of the *putschistes* of 13 May. In their opinion, to vote for de Gaulle's constitution was to justify the political illegality of force. But at the socialist congress of 11–14 September, Guy Mollet defended the constitution, of which he was one of the principal architects, and received the decisive support of Gaston Defferre, head of the powerful Bouches-du-Rhône federation. Defferre supported a liberal policy for Algeria and rallied to de Gaulle, whose investiture he had voted against, as the only man capable of implementing the Algerian policy which he himself favoured. The 69 per cent of SFIO mandates which Mollet obtained for the 'yes' vote represented a considerable personal success for him. It was, however, a pyrrhic victory since it led to a split within the party. The SFIO Left refused to accept the regime of 13 May, and under the leadership of Edouard Depreux, Robert Verdier and Daniel Mayer broke away to form the Parti socialiste autonome.

Thus all the major political parties, with the exception of the communists, came out in favour of the constitution. They were supported by the new political groupings which emerged in July 1958 and which sought to carve out a place in the political sun by assuming the role of apostles of the new regime: Georges Bidault's Démocratie chrétienne, a group of ex-MRP members who judged their old party too liberal; the Centre de la réforme républicaine, which placed at the service of the new constitution left-wing



Gaullists from the SFIO (the Pyrénées-Orientales deputy, Paul Alduy); the UDSR (Lipkowski); and the Radical Party (Naudet). To these should be added the numerous Gaullist groupings such as the Union civique pour le référendum et la V<sup>e</sup> République of Jacques Chaban-Delmas and Pasteur Valléry-Radot, and the Union pour le renouveau français of Jacques Soustelle which sought to broaden the restricted audience of the social republicans. The name of Soustelle's group recalled the Union pour le salut et le renouveau de l'Algérie française in which the former minister had been active in the last years of the Fourth Republic. Another formation was the Association nationale pour le soutien de l'action du general de Gaulle, run by Yvon Morandot and Jean Sainteny, both partisans of a Gaullist Labourism.

Faced with this tidal wave of 'yes' supporters, the opposition had little to offer. On the Right there was virtually no organised force to advocate rejection of the constitution. Pierre Poujade, whose movement was rapidly disintegrating, led a very isolated 'no' campaign that brought together a handful of Pétainist loyalists and a few hardline Catholics who could not accept article 2's definition of France as a secular republic. Thus it was on the Left that the core of the 'no' supporters were to be found. Head and shoulders above the rest stood the Communist Party, which ever since May had presented itself as the principal and intransigent opponent of a regime which it claimed 'opened the way' to Fascism, and was establishing a 'personal power' via the special powers, the referendum procedure and the constitutional text. This hostile stance was shared by a cartel, created for the occasion on 7 July, called the Union des forces démocratiques, which aimed to be a rallying-point for those left wingers who had broken with the established parties, minority groups facing either a split or expulsion. Under the presidency of Daniel Mayer, a former socialist deputy and the President of the League of the Rights of Man, the UFD brought together the radical supporters of Pierre Mendès France, the left wing of the UDSR under François Mitterrand (whose success in getting the party to adopt a 'no' position had led to the departure of the 'yes' supporters under René Pleven and Eugène Claudius-Petit), the Leftist Catholics of Jeune République, the Union de la Gauche socialiste, recently created by the editors of the weekly *France-Observateur*, Gilles Martinet and Claude Bourdet, and trade unionists from the CFTC and the Fédération de l'éducation nationale. Overall, it was a pretty heterogeneous collection which reflected the views of the modernising and intellectual Left but had little to oppose to the 'yes' decision of the major parties. In such circumstances it was easy for the Gaullists to identify the 'no' camp as a group dominated by the communists.

The disproportion between the two sides was further accentuated by the circumstances in which the referendum was held. Of the twenty-three



'recognised' formations allowed to use the radio and the official advertising hoardings, seventeen supported the 'yes' camp. Public money financed the free distribution of millions of copies of the journal *France-Référendum* and supported the Gaullist organisations created for the occasion. A flood of 'Yes to France' posters swept the country, and television and radio coverage (each of the recognised organisations were allocated five minutes on both media) was dominated by 'yes' supporters. This imbalance reflected not only the latter's numerical advantage, but also the fact that radio and television news programmes gave most time to representatives of groups favourable to the constitution. On top of this – and beyond the airtime reserved for the parties – Jacques Soustelle, the Minister of Information, gave an interview and de Gaulle made a radio and television appeal in favour of the constitution which succeeded in winning over the doubtful. Lacking money, resources, newspapers and activists, the opposition was defeated in advance and failed to make any impression on public opinion. The impression it created on television and radio was of a minority, indeed a marginal, force, in thrall to the Communist Party. A 'yes' victory was thus assured and the only uncertainty was its scale.

And on the evening of 28 September, the result turned out to be a landslide victory for the supporters of the Fifth Republic. The constitution was adopted by a huge majority (80 per cent) of the votes cast; de Gaulle had received the overwhelming support of the French people.

Analysis of the vote showed in the first place an extraordinarily high turnout, since 85 per cent of the French cast their vote. Abstention levels were highest in central and south-west France, the traditional fiefs of a non-communist Left that had been very divided over its attitude, and this clearly reflected the disarray of a hopelessly confused political family. The geographical distribution of the vote showed just how massive was France's approval of the Fifth Republic. All the French départements, without exception, voted yes. It is true that the majority was greater in the traditionally conservative departments of eastern and western France – the Gironde, the Basses Pyrénées, the Haute-Loire – than in areas where the

Table 1. *Results of the 28 September 1958 referendum*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	26,603,464	100	
Votes	22,596,860		
Abstentions	4,006,614	15.06	
Spoilt papers	303,559	1.14	
'Yes'	17,668,790	66.41	79.26
'No'	4,624,511	17.38	20.74





Map 1 'Yes' votes in 28 September 1958 referendum

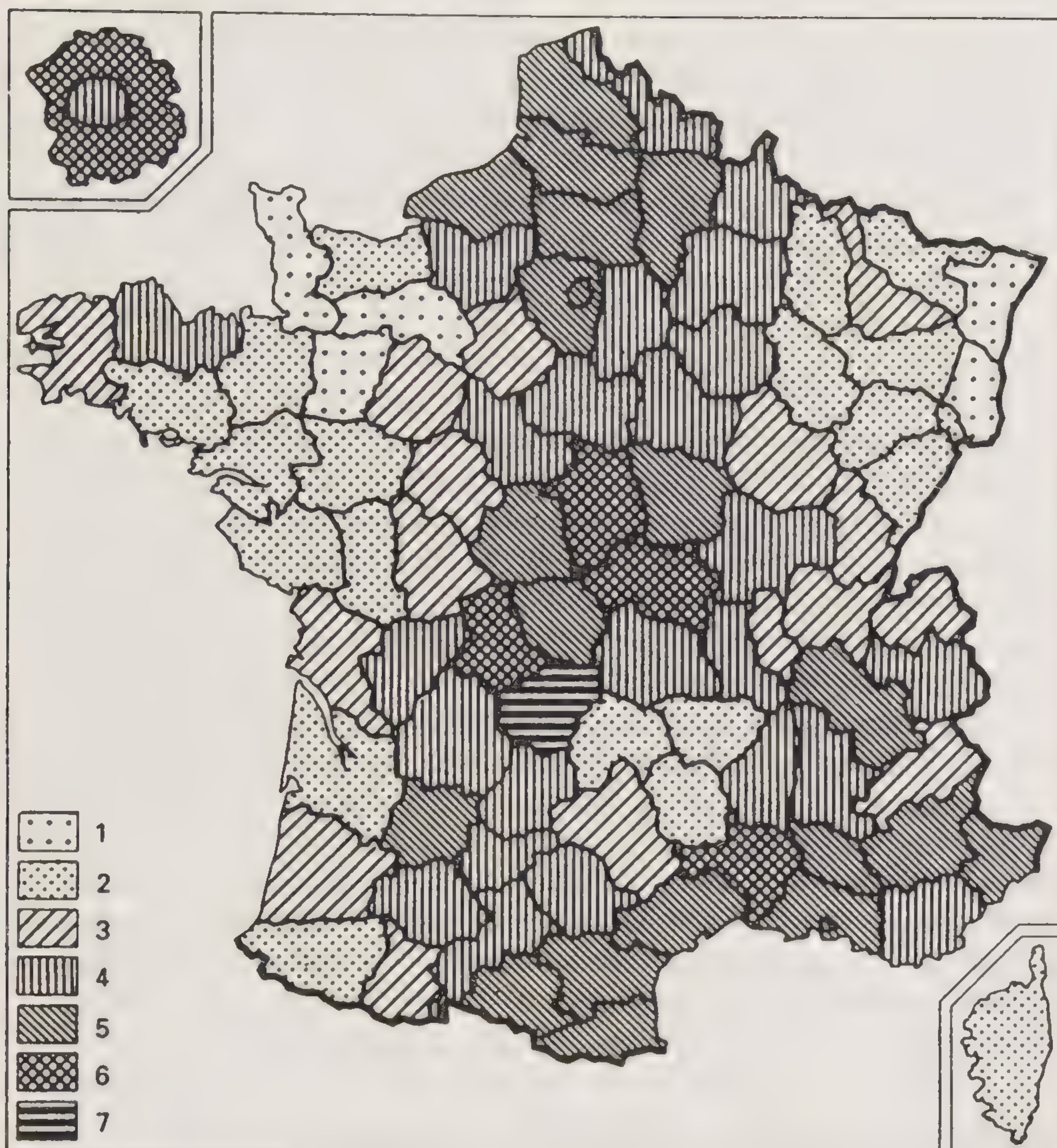
Percentage of electorate

(1) 50-54.9 (2) 55-59.9 (3) 60-64.9 (4) 65-69.9 (5) 70-74.9  
(6) 75-79.9 (7) 80.5

Source: F. Goguel, *Chroniques électorales*, Presses de la FNSP, vol. II, p. 13

Left normally received its highest votes – the North, the northern and western regions of the Massif Central and the Mediterranean departments. Yet in the first group the 'yes' vote outstripped the traditional conservative vote, and in the second the 'no' vote fell way below the normal score of the Left. The geographical analysis merely confirmed the obvious. The 20 per cent obtained in the referendum by the 'noes' can usefully be compared with the 25 per cent which the communists gained in Fourth Republic





elections, especially when one remembers that fractions of the Right and a not insignificant percentage of the non-communist Left had also advocated rejection. Assuming that between 700,000 and one million 'no' votes came from non-communists, it is clear that between 1.6 and 1.9 million voters (a third of the total) had ignored the party's instructions and preferred de Gaulle to the PCF. On 28 September the Fifth Republic received its juridical consecration in conditions of popular approval that henceforth



made redundant accusations of the 'original sin' of 13 May. The second, linked lesson of the referendum was the collapse of the anti-regime Left. What made this rout particularly painful to bear for the Left was that, immediately after the trauma of the referendum and in a very weakened position, it was obliged once again to go to the polls in the parliamentary elections that were fixed for 23 November. These were to be a major test for a party system that now found itself in severe crisis.

### *The party crisis of the early Fifth Republic*

The shock of 13 May and the shattering of the political landscape that ensued dealt a fatal blow to political forces which since 1953–4 had been suffering the effects of their unsuitability for the new society that was being fashioned out of economic growth. Between 1945 and 1947, the modernisation hopes that had emerged during and after the Second World War disappeared, and with the outbreak of the Cold War came the virtual reconstitution of the old political system. The political parties took on their pre-war shape; party programmes reflected ideological positions that often dated from the first years of the twentieth century, and institutional practice followed the paths laid down in the Third Republic. With the first fruits of economic growth in 1953–4, the disjunction between aged and sclerotic parties and the as yet confused aspirations of a society beginning to perceive the dawn of new horizons, resulted in the discrediting of the parties and a stumbling search for new political formulae. Mendesism, Poujadism and the creation of the 'new Left' were all signs of this latent malaise which would contribute to the decay of the regime. On the eve of 13 May, there was virtually no party immune to what looked like a generalised crisis of the political order. The Communist Party had been rocked in 1956 by the disclosures of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on the crimes of Stalin and the entry of Soviet tanks into Hungary, and as a result suffered its first major loss of membership since the Second World War. The moderates of the CNIP were outflanked by the Poujadists, who violently attacked their commitment to parliamentarism, and were forced as a result to move sharply rightwards. Meanwhile, the parties of both Left and Centre were in a state of latent disintegration which the modernisation, identified with Mendesism, served to highlight. To the cracks already revealed by the EDC quarrel, Mendesism added new fracture lines amongst the socialists, the UDSR, the Radical Party and the social republicans. It led the MRP to disown those of its members who had used the alleged convergences between Mendesist values and those of the movement's founders to support Mendès' experiment, and to harden its opposition to such an extent that the party's left wing became seriously alarmed. When, after 1956, the MRP sought to move back towards the Centre so as



to avoid the temptations of the Right, it provoked a conservative backlash led by Georges Bidault.

De Gaulle's return to power and the constitutional project merely served to aggravate an existing crisis. Its principal victims were to be found in the Centre and the Left (where the bulk of the opposition to the Fifth Republic existed), rather than among the communists or the Right which used the opportunity to conceal its divisions behind a trumpeted – but often unclearly defined – Gaullism. The struggle against a 'personal regime opening the way to fascism' enabled the Communist Party to conceal the depth of its crisis by re-establishing the appearance of unity through a radical opposition that was nevertheless extremely costly in electoral terms. The CNIP rallied enthusiastically to de Gaulle in whom it saw both the man of order who would put a stop to dissidents and troublemakers, and – above all – the strong man who would save French Algeria. Yet it was clearly in the Gaullist ranks that de Gaulle stood out as the providential leader. Who were more fitted to support his action in parliament than those who had fought in the RPF or in the social republicans and who had stayed true, albeit with a few excursions into the pathways of power, during the years of the 'crossing of the desert'? There was, of course, a problem – de Gaulle's resolute refusal to give his backing to any political formation or to allow any party to use his name. It was nevertheless in the prime minister's office that, in summer 1958, the foundations were laid for a union of the numerous Gaullist groups that had sprung up in July. The general pretended to be unaware of the secret meetings that brought together his Matignon staff – Olivier Guichard, Pierre Lefranc, Jacques Foccart, Jacques Richard – and the social republicans' political heavyweights, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Roger Frey and Jacques Soustelle (see J. Lacoutre *De Gaulle*, II, pp. 545–6).

On 1 October, just after the referendum, the negotiations gave birth to the Union pour la Nouvelle République which brought together in one federation the bulk of the Gaullist formations from the *Républicains sociaux*, to the Union pour le renouveau français and the Convention républicaine. The UNR was headed by a management committee of thirteen men, including three ministers, Michel Debré, Edmond Michelet and Jacques Soustelle (André Malraux refused to participate), plus the leading figures in parliamentary Gaullism, such as Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Roger Frey and Albin Chalandon. What was as yet unclear was the extent to which a very unstructured Federation was to be controlled by Jacques Soustelle, who gave the impression of being the leader of political Gaullism. Sections of public opinion assumed that this would happen, and Soustelle himself undoubtedly intended that it should. It took only a few weeks for it to become clear that despite some members' hopes, Jacques Soustelle was not going to realise his ambition of becoming the political



leader of the fledgling organisation of the UNR. Even if de Gaulle affected not to intervene in the workings of the new party, his collaborators in the prime minister's office moved quickly to squash the ambitions of the Minister of Information, initially by opposing the election of a UNR president, a post which Soustelle greatly coveted. The pretext advanced was that there was only one possible president for the Gaullist party – the man of 18 June, who pretended to be unaware of the party's existence. Instead of a president, a secretary general was appointed – Roger Frey, who controlled the party machine, but not the party. Soustelle suffered another defeat on 16 October when he attempted to get the UNR to make common cause with his three accomplices of the Union pour le salut et le renouveau de l'Algérie française, Georges Bidault (Démocratie chrétienne), Roger Duchet (general secretary of the Centre national des indépendants) and André Morice (Centre républicain). To the strong protests from the management committee of the UNR de Gaulle added his personal veto. And finally, when the time came to choose the UNR candidates for the legislative elections of 23 November, the selection procedure was entrusted neither to Soustelle nor to the other champion of French Algeria, Léon Delbecq, but to Roger Frey and his assistants Jacques Baumel and Jacques Marette; in other words, to Gaullists strongly supported by the Matignon office. The majority of the candidates were chosen by virtue of their loyalty to de Gaulle.

If de Gaulle's coming to power strengthened the cohesion of his communist enemies and of his supporters amongst the moderates and (above all) the Gaullists, it had dramatically opposite results for the remaining political groupings. The MRP, which had suffered from an identity crisis ever since the break with de Gaulle in 1947 and the creation of the RPF, found itself plunged into even greater turmoil with the emergence of the UNR, the new electoral law and the latent anti-parliamentarism of public opinion. Radicalism was already split into three factions (the RGR, the Centre républicain, the Radical Party), and now suffered a fourth blow with the entry of Pierre Mendès France and his friends into the Union des forces démocratiques. Both the Socialist Party and the UDSR split over the referendum question along lines that had for long been visible. Faced with a Right in the full flush of its victory, the Centre and the Left approached the legislative elections in a state of defeat.

### *The elections of October 1958*

The constitution of 28 September had not dealt with the electoral system, despite the wishes of the Consultative Constitutional Committee, because de Gaulle intended to resolve the matter according to the results he expected from the vote. The MRP was in favour of the proportional



representation system which operated during the Fourth Republic, and which seemed essential to a party that lacked the local influence derived from a network of notables. Such a system was rejected from the outset by de Gaulle who had no intention of preserving the system of joint list *apparelements* which he had bitterly criticised in 1951, and who feared that a fully fledged proportional representation system would increase the parliamentary strength of the Communist Party. Hence the sole issue was the form of majority system to use. It was once again the fear of a good communist performance that led to the rejection of the British system of single-member, single-round, elections favoured by Michel Debré. This left the choice of a departmental list or a single-member system. In the end, on 7 September, the council of ministers opted for the second alternative, once de Gaulle had come out in favour – more out of pragmatism than doctrine – of a system that had been so beneficial to radicalism in the Third Republic. He hoped that its reintroduction would weaken the ‘tyranny of parties’ in elections: in a France divided into nearly 500 constituencies, it would reduce the risk of the referendum result becoming an electoral landslide and yielding a Chamber dominated by the hard Right. De Gaulle’s preference was for a Centre-Left Assembly in which the socialists and radicals, who were familiar with single-member constituencies, would dominate. And to avoid the electoral manoeuvres that had discredited the single-member systems in the Third Republic, a number of preventive measures were adopted. The second round was to take place a week, and not a fortnight, after the first; no new candidate could stand in the second round; to proceed to the second round a candidate must have obtained 5 per cent of the votes cast in the first round. The reintroduction of an electoral system that had disappeared with the Third Republic involved the sensitive task of fixing constituency boundaries, a job that was made even more delicate by the proposed reduction in the number of deputies in metropolitan France from 544 to 465. The principle adopted was of allocating constituencies in proportion to their population, with an average of one deputy for every 93,000 inhabitants. Since each department was to have at least two deputies, the thinly populated departments were naturally advantaged. There can be no doubt that the constituency distribution was systematically unfavourable to the communists, and that in some circumstances it benefited the supporters of the new regime. Yet in general, observers agreed that the distribution was as fair as it could be in circumstances where the division of a city or the transfer of a canton from one constituency to another was bound to affect the final result. This was the verdict of Maurice Duverger in ‘Paradoxes of an Electoral Reform’ and of the journalist Jacques Fauvet who wrote in *Le Monde* that ‘the construction of a new electoral map was a sensitive operation; given the observations that have been made, the operation was carried out honourably’.



The electoral campaign of November 1958 is universally agreed to have been one of the most lacklustre in French parliamentary history since it was very difficult, in the aftermath of the referendum, to distinguish between the political positions of the parties. Amongst the supporters of the 'no' vote, the Communist Party had been badly shaken by the September result, was completely isolated, and was bound, given the nature of the electoral system, to suffer another defeat. Hence it ran a timid and undynamic campaign, concentrating its efforts on the handful of constituencies where it looked capable of saving one of its parliamentary representatives. Meanwhile the Union des forces démocratiques, which lacked resources and was only able to stand in ninety constituencies, was barely able to make its voice heard. The massed voices of the 'yes' forces were, by contrast, heard loud and clear, and the principal difficulty lay in distinguishing the different notes. From the socialists to the UNR, all, with touching unanimity, claimed to speak in de Gaulle's name. In vain did the latter declare before the vote that 'impartiality requires me not to allow my name, even in adjectival form, to be used in the declarations of any party or any candidate'. The campaign was one of 'universal Gaullism', and most candidates unashamedly claimed that a vote for them was a vote for de Gaulle; many also surrendered to the prevailing anti-parliamentarism by describing themselves as new men.

The outcome of the first round was very significant, providing the emerging Fifth Republic with a completely new political landscape. The high level of abstentions (22.9 per cent compared with 15.06 per cent in the referendum) showed the gulf between the massive confidence vested in de Gaulle and his institutions, and the continuing distrust of the political parties. In 1958, anti-parliamentarism undoubtedly contributed to this situation; but so probably did the disarray of the Left's electorate. For the other important result of round one was the slump in the communist vote.

The loss of 1.6 million communist votes – virtually one third of the party's electorate compared with its 1956 source – confirmed the lessons of the referendum. If one obvious explanation was the resolutely anti-Gaullist choice made by the party since May 1958, one which went against the dominant trends of public opinion, another was the delayed consequences of earlier events which had not yet found their electoral expression, such as the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and the Soviet intervention in Hungary. Yet the modern Left also failed disastrously, given that the UFD obtained barely 1 per cent of the overall vote and only 5 per cent in the constituencies where it stood. Alongside this veritable collapse of the Left, the third lesson of the first round was the stagnation or decline of the Centre parties which had provided the political cement of the Fourth Republic and had subsequently rallied to de Gaulle. The Socialist Party and the MRP held on to their percentage vote of 1956 (15.7 per cent of



Table 2. *Legislative elections of 23 and 30 November 1958: first round*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	27,236,491	100	
Vote	20,994,797		
Abstentions	6,241,694	22.9	
Spoilt papers	652,889	2.3	
PCF	3,907,763	14.3	19.2
UFD	261,738	0.9	1.2
SFIO	3,193,786	11.7	15.7
Radicals and allies	1,503,787	5.5	7.3
MRP	2,273,281	8.3	11.1
Gaullists (UNR, Left Gaullists and others)	4,165,453	15.2	20.4
Moderates	4,502,449	16.5	22.1
Extreme right	553,651	1.9	2.6

Throughout the book, percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth. As a result, column totals generally add up to slightly under 100 per cent.

votes cast compared with 15.2 and 11.1 per cent in 1956), whereas the radicals paid the price of their internal crisis and break-up by a complete collapse. (They stood in only 209 constituencies and obtained 7.3 per cent of the overall vote compared with about 15 per cent in 1956). The right-wing forces, by contrast, were the great victors of the election thanks to their apparent closeness to the new regime. It is true that the extreme Right collapsed, in particular the Poujade movement which got only 0.5 per cent of its total of score 2.6 per cent. But the Centre-Right, represented by the CNIP which obtained 22 per cent of the vote, became the largest electoral force in France, and the newly formed UNR created the big surprise of the elections by winning more than 20 per cent of the vote. Yet it is not easy to interpret this election. It can be seen either as a further plebiscite of Gaullism – in which case the result was decided by the degree to which the parties identified with de Gaulle – or as a shift to the Right, in which case Gaullism was simply another variant of conservatism. There was no way of knowing at the end of November which of these two analyses was correct; some of the major political conflicts of the future would derive from the resulting uncertainty.

The second round magnified, on occasion to the point of caricature, the trends revealed in the first, and produced an overall result that was very different from the one de Gaulle had expected. On one issue there was convergence between the aims of the authors of the electoral law and the actual outcome, and that was the defeat of the Communist Party. The latter found itself isolated in a majoritarian electoral system, and was quite



Table 3. *Legislative elections of 23 and 30 November 1958: second round*

	Number of deputies elected
PCF	10
SFIO	44
Radicals and allies	23
MRP	57
UNR	198
Moderates	133

These figures are for mainland France and should be supplemented by the 67 deputies for Algeria, 4 for the Sahara, 10 for overseas departments and 6 for overseas territories

unable to profit from socialist votes in the second round once Guy Mollet had declared that 'no compromise is possible between socialists and the supporters of bolshevism'. With only ten deputies (as against 150 in 1956), the Communist Party was the principal victim of the elections. Yet the socialists and radicals completely failed to derive any benefit from a system that was intended to help them; the former lost fifty-one seats and the latter thirty-five. The MRP also lost thirty seats. All these parties paid the price for identifying with the Fourth Republic in the political annihilation of the outgoing deputies. Out of the 475 deputies elected in 1956 who stood in November 1958, no fewer than 334 were defeated, among them many of the most prominent figures in recent French history; the former prime ministers Pierre Mendès France, Edgar Faure, Joseph Laniel and Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury; the socialists Gaston Defferre, Robert Lacoste, Jules Moch, Christian Pineau and André le Troquer; the UDSR François Mitterrand; the MRP Teitgen and Bacon; and the radical Daladier. The major winners were, by contrast, the Gaullists and the moderates. As Maurice Duverger pointed out, these two groups, which had won 37.5 per cent of the vote in round one, gained 66 per cent of the deputies in mainland France: 198 for the Gaullists, 133 for the moderates. Thus the rejection of the Fourth Republic and the double plebiscite of Gaullism gave the founder of the Fifth Republic a victory which, as he wrote in *Memoirs of Hope*, 'exceeded his own hopes'. The Fifth Republic was to be a Gaullist republic.

### *The new system takes over*

Though delighted by his electoral triumph, de Gaulle was concerned to limit its effects so as not to appear the prisoner of his supporters. The latter, for their part, had no intention of retreating into a deference that was no



longer needed. Proof of this was shown in the 9 December election of the president of the new Assembly. De Gaulle had thought of Paul Reynaud for this post, remembering that the latter had championed his military ideas in the 1930s and, as prime minister, had appointed him Under-Secretary of State for War in June 1940. But Reynaud, a moderate who had presided over the Constitutional Consultative Committee came up against the ambition of Jacques Chaban-Delmas and his awareness that he could count on the keen desire of the Gaullist deputies to get their hands on positions of responsibility. Ignoring the pleas of de Gaulle's emissaries, the mayor of Bordeaux (and former president of the social republicans) won an easy victory in round two, Reynaud having quit after his defeat by 259 votes to 168 in the first ballot. De Gaulle had to accept (and he did so without obvious resentment) that the Assembly would be dominated by the 'barons' of the RPF, men whose Gaullism was more rigid than his own. He had found out once again that his supporters' victory 'exceeded his hopes'.

21 December was chosen for one of the most important foundation rites of the new regime – the election of the president of the Republic by the electoral college of some 80,000 notables created by the constitution. Even though de Gaulle had feigned hesitation over his candidature, everyone knew that he would stand and that he would be elected. On 2 December, after a government announcement revealed that President Coty did not wish to stand and assured him of the 'respect and gratitude of the nation', de Gaulle announced his decision to be a candidate for the top position of state. The result was a foregone conclusion since the only opposition came from the symbolic candidatures of the communist senator Georges Marianne and Albert Chatelet, Dean of the Paris science faculty, who was put up by the Union des forces démocratiques. The result was predictable – General de Gaulle was elected President of the Republic with 78.5 per cent of the votes against 13.1 per cent for Marianne and 8.4 per cent for Chatelet.

The Fourth Republic was now, like the period of political adjustment, approaching its end. On 8 January 1959 the formal transfer of power from René Coty to Charles de Gaulle took place in the state rooms of the Elysée where René Cassin, vice-president of the Conseil d'Etat, formally declared the result of the vote of 21 December. After lunch, the outgoing president and his successor travelled together to the Arc de Triomphe for the traditional homage to the Unknown Soldier. The president of the Republic then casually abandoned a dumbfounded Coty on the pavement and drove back along the Champs Elysées, accompanied by Georges Pompidou, who had resigned from his position as head of de Gaulle's private office to join Rothschild's bank. The uncharacteristic brutality of this gesture was unquestionably premeditated and symbolic. De Gaulle refused to accept a formal transfer of power which, albeit juridically necessary, was pro-



foundly unacceptable to a man convinced that he embodied a historical legitimacy, temporarily usurped by the Fourth Republic, which in no sense reduced him to the status of successor to Vincent Auriol and René Coty. For de Gaulle, the closing of the doors behind the new head of State on 8 January 1959 signalled the ending of the parenthesis begun in January 1946 with his departure from government.

On 9 January Michel Debré, who had hitherto been Minister of Justice and principal draughtsman of the new constitution, was officially appointed prime minister with the task of putting into practice the text he had drawn up. The government he formed was similar in composition to its predecessor in that it contained four ministers of state (one radical sympathiser, Houphouët-Boigny, one independent, Jacquinot, one MRP member, Robert Lecourt, and one Gaullist, André Malraux at Cultural Affairs). The most noteworthy absence was that of the socialists, who had officially decided to resign in December 1958 in opposition to the government's economic and financial measures, but had agreed to delay their departure until de Gaulle took up his new position. The composition of the government acknowledged the outcome of the election by giving a larger place to the UNR. Soustelle became minister delegate to the prime minister, Raymond Triboulet received the Ex-Servicemen's portfolio, Cornut-Gentile became Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Roger Frey took over Information and Edmond Michelet Justice. Senior civil servants continued to hold the portfolios of Foreign Affairs (Couve de Murville) and Armed Forces (Guillaumat), and also took over the ministries of National Education (André Boulloche, who was close to the SFIO), Public Health and Population (Bernard Chenot) and Construction (Pierre Sudreau). On top of this Debré appointed a professor of political economy, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Though it is fair to say that the government's centre of gravity shifted towards de Gaulle's supporters and top civil servants, many of whom were Gaullist sympathisers and away from the political parties, the latter maintained an important presence. The independents held the ministries of Finance (Antoine Pinay) and Agriculture (Roger Houdet); the MRP held Employment (Paul Bacon), and Public Works and Transport (Robert Buron); and the radical Berthoin moved to the Interior. With the exception of the socialists, who now moved into opposition, de Gaulle continued to enjoy the active co-operation of a large proportion of the political nation.

The last act in the establishment of the new order took place in April 1959 with the election of the Senate, which in turn rendered possible the convocation of parliament. Elections had taken place earlier on 8 and 15 March, to replace the town councils elected in March 1953 whose term of office had now legally expired. The results showed that even if universal suffrage had elected the Gaullists and the Right in November 1958, the



overwhelming characteristic of elections at local level was one of stability: the communists enjoyed a wide-ranging recovery, generally attributed to the unpopularity of the economic and financial measures in the Pinay–Rueff Plan, and independents, socialists, radicals and the MRP all held on to their positions. A similar stability characterised the senatorial elections of 26 April. 84 per cent of outgoing senators were re-elected, and the Left held 40 per cent of the seats in the second Chamber. Most of the political leaders defeated in the legislative elections won back a parliamentary seat, for example Jacques Duclos, Gaston Defferre, Edgar Faure and François Mitterrand. The Senate became the forum for the vigorous expression of an opposition that was extremely weak in the National Assembly. With the passage of time and the broadening of its membership, the opposition was to dominate the Senate, which thus became a perpetual irritant to the smooth running of the machinery of the Gaullist Republic, even though it could not bring it to a standstill.

The Fifth Republic was now firmly established. The new order was in place and ready to act. It now had to govern and to prove its credibility by finding a solution to its most fundamental problem – the conflict in Algeria.



## The problem of Algeria

### *De Gaulle and Algeria*

Whatever de Gaulle's verdict on the events – and immediate aftermath – of 13 May, it is beyond doubt that he owed his return to power to the Algerian war. Everyone – from his earliest supporters to those who, like Gaston Defferre, had rallied to him in the September referendum, from the rebels of 13 May to the mainland citizens appalled by the prospect of Fascism parachuted in from Algeria – was waiting for de Gaulle to put an end to the conflict. But there was also an evident diversity of views as to how the war should be ended. That de Gaulle would be able to crush the FLN and fulfil the aspirations of the supporters of French Algeria appeared obvious not only to the activists in Algeria itself, but also to the majority of public opinion in mainland France which hoped to keep the country French (an IFOP poll indicated that 52 per cent of the French wanted integration and 41 per cent independence). The supporters of independence, or at least of a liberal settlement for Algeria – a minority in 1958 – believed that only de Gaulle possessed sufficient authority to impose the Algerian solution which they advocated. History would prove that they were right.

Yet there is currently no proof that the solution eventually arrived at was the one which de Gaulle favoured in 1958. In *Memoirs of Hope*, published in 1970, de Gaulle stated that 'there was in my opinion no other solution than that of Algerian self-determination', and thereby portrayed the succeeding events as the outcome of a process at once willed and patiently prepared 'not in leaps, but step by step' (*Mémoires d'espoir*, p. 108). Though the facts would appear to support the second assertion, they offer less justification for the first, and it is generally agreed that when he returned to power in 1958, de Gaulle had no clear idea of how to resolve the conflict. In a 1955 press conference at the Hôtel Continental, he had floated the idea of an 'association' of Algeria with France, a formula which was capable of any number of juridical forms. To those of his supporters favourable to independence whom he received before his return to power (Edmond



Michelet, Maurice Clavel and Louis Terrenoire) he let it be known that he was on their side. But he refrained from any criticism of the pro-French Algeria arguments found in the books that Jacques Soustelle wrote and sent to him (*Aimée et Souffrante Algérie*, and *Le Drame algérien et la décadence française*), remarking simply that the Fourth Republic was incapable of maintaining Algeria within the national community. Soustelle, like Michel Debré, was utterly convinced that de Gaulle was in favour of French Algeria. In reality, de Gaulle stuck to the path on which he had already determined (he told Louis Terrenoire that 'If I have a plan, I won't tell anyone about it'), and deliberately kept his intentions vague, thereby allowing all parties to draw their own conclusions from his contradictory remarks and to build their own hopes on his supposed programme. The composition of de Gaulle's government was equally unenlightening. Michel Debré, a dedicated supporter of French Algeria, was Minister of Justice; but in the policy unit dealing with Algerian affairs, the General appointed as assistant to the secretary general, René Brouillet, Bernard Tricot who had let him know that he was in favour of a liberal solution that might culminate in independence. De Gaulle's own declarations had something for everyone. The celebrated 'I have understood you', which unleashed a torrent of enthusiasm from the Algerian crowds to whom it was addressed on 4 June, gave no clear indication of what it was that de Gaulle had actually understood. In a radio broadcast of 13 June, de Gaulle spoke of 'pacifying Algeria so that she will be for all time linked in body and soul to France'; a fortnight later came 'Algeria! France wants to determine the conditions of your future with the Algerians themselves. So let their voices be heard' (*Discours et messages*, III, pp. 18–20). In the present state of historical evidence, there is nothing to prove that de Gaulle had a clear idea of what policy to adopt in Algeria at the moment of his return to power.

In the context he opted for pragmatism and for a secrecy about his long-term intentions that obliged those military and civil officials responsible for carrying out French policy to engage in a permanent, and sometimes contradictory, decoding of his delphic utterances. The only permanent theme of the Algerian policy was his determination to ensure the success of the 'most French solution', while recognising that the content of such a goal would vary with the circumstances. And between 1958 and 1962 these circumstances became progressively more unfavourable to the cause of French Algeria. The FLN became ever more intransigent in its refusal to negotiate anything other than independence; international opinion moved ever more steadily against the Algerian war; and the French themselves became increasingly weary of, and then hostile to, a war that seemed to have no solution. De Gaulle's adjustment to this shifting situation took the form of a series of speeches and declarations, revealing



the evolution of his own beliefs and constituting a course of political education directed at national and international opinion, the army, and the European population of Algeria, which the *Le Monde* journalist Pierre Vianson-Ponté described as 'government by words'. In *Memoirs of Hope* de Gaulle himself defined his pedagogy and referred to the step by step evolution of his policy as the 'unveiling by myself of each stage only when I had prepared the ground for it both in deeds and in minds'. Thus four successive – and evolving – stages can be identified in de Gaulle's Algerian policy between June 1958 and spring 1962.

*Stage one: 'a warriors' peace' (June–December 1958)*

There were two reasons why in June 1958 Algeria was the most serious problem that the government had to face. The first was the condition of the three overseas departments, divided as they were between an FLN that demanded independence and a European population that had demonstrated on 13 May, together with a section of the armed forces, its determination to remain French. But for a political leader determined to resurrect the authority of the state, the second problem was equally grave: the existence in Algeria of extra-legal power in the form of unofficial command structures (committees of public safety), recognised by the local population, who imposed their authority by virtually usurping that of the representatives of the state and who included a considerable number of military personnel. This was the extremely complex situation that de Gaulle had to face on his return to power, one which he regarded – correctly – as a potential threat to his own authority. For what would his authority be worth if it were to depend on the goodwill of committees of civil and military activists claiming the right to impose their wishes on the government?

The fundamental seriousness of the Algerian problem is shown by the fact that between June and December 1958, a period which saw the drawing-up of the constitution, the preparation of the referendum and the installation of the new governmental system, de Gaulle made no fewer than five visits to Algeria in an attempt to settle the two issues of the future of the thirteen departments, and the consolidation of the authority of the state.

It is fair to say that if on the first issue de Gaulle took care not to mortgage the future (his 4 June speech at Algiers postponed any solution until after the legislative elections, 'once the deputies are elected we will decide what to do'), he sketched out an overall scenario that responded to the wishes of the supporters of French Algeria. De Gaulle never pronounced the term itself, save on one famous occasion at Mostaganem on 6 June when he was carried away by the enthusiasm of a rapturous audience. (It is noteworthy that volume VIII of *Lettres, notes et carnets, Juin 1958–*



*décembre 1960* includes the Mostaganem speech without the celebrated phrase 'Vive l'Algérie française!', even though numerous witnesses confirm that he used this rather than the 'Vive l'Algérie!' which appears in the text. This can be interpreted either as loyalty to the spirit rather than to the letter of the text, or as reliance on speech notes that do not use the formula.) In the same way the word 'integration' never appears in the many speeches which de Gaulle made during his five visits. Yet the fact remains that integration was indeed de Gaulle's chosen policy, and that it underpinned a whole series of the decisions he took. Later in the 4 June speech in which de Gaulle told the people of Algiers that he had understood them, he proclaimed the equality of French and Muslim within a single electoral college that would end the existing inequalities, thus laying the foundation stone of integration. And that the destiny of this henceforth integrated Algeria was to remain French was clearly shown by the insistence with which de Gaulle, on three occasions, addressed his listeners as 'fully fledged Frenchmen, possessing the same rights and the same duties'. The immediate consequence was that the 10 million French Algerians, just like the French who inhabited the mainland and the overseas departments, took part in the referendum of 28 September and the legislative elections of November.

Despite de Gaulle's instructions in August that the election campaigns should be completely free, the military authorities and the Information Minister, Jacques Soustelle, worked together to guarantee a 'yes' vote in the referendum and the election of pro-French Algeria deputies. In so doing they spared no propaganda effort and systematically interfered with the liberty of expression of the 'no' supporters and the supporters of the liberal candidates in the elections. The results appeared to represent a triumph: in September, 96.5 per cent of the voters (76.1 per cent of the electorate) voted yes. Yet differing interpretations of its significance were possible. Jacques Soustelle viewed it as a plebiscite in favour of integration, whereas de Gaulle preferred to see the result as a simple expression of confidence in himself, rather than as a vote in favour of a policy whose contours he had not yet determined. The November elections, in which no liberal candidates ultimately succeeded in standing, also looked like a tidal wave of support in favour of French Algeria. Marked by a particularly high abstention rate (the FLN had ordered a boycott of the elections), they resulted in the election of forty-six Muslims and twenty-one Europeans, all of whom strongly supported the policy of integration and formed a parliamentary group whose members took an oath to bring about its success. Even allowing for the undoubted existence of army pressure, integration did indeed appear to be the policy which the government – at least officially – advocated, and which had the massive support of the French and Muslim electorate in Algeria.

This policy of close and enduring association between France and



Algeria also informed the economic dimension of de Gaulle's declared action. As early as 3 July, during his second visit, de Gaulle announced in an Algiers speech a programme of economic and social renovation. On his fourth visit, he spelled out at Constantine on 3 October the major elements of this five-year plan, the 'Constantine Plan'. Its goals were ambitious since it sought to win over to a French solution a population which had little reason to be grateful for what it had received up until now: parity of wages between Algeria and the mainland, the guarantee that 10 per cent of public-sector positions would be reserved for Muslims, schooling for all Algerian children, the creation of 400,000 new jobs, the bringing into service and allocation to Muslims of 250,000 hectares of arable land, the use of Algerian gas and oil to stimulate industrial growth, development of the chemical and metallurgical industries, and a housing programme targeting a million people. Though de Gaulle caused the integrationists some anxiety when he declared at Oran on 2 October, 'Long live Algeria with France, long live France with Algeria', the Constantine Plan seemed a clear affirmation of French determination to remain on the other side of the Mediterranean.

This impression was further strengthened by the government's military policy, and attitude, towards the FLN. De Gaulle's visit in early July took on the image of a military tour of inspection, and it was clear that he sought a victory on the ground which would crush the last bastions of the rebellion. To this end he had imposed a new strategy on the military command, requiring it to replace the containment approach that aimed at maintaining existing positions with one of attacks on the zones where the FLN was strong – Aurès and Nementchas, Kabylie, the Temcen region, and so on. Moreover, the military wing of the revolt, torn apart by internal quarrels, looked to be on the verge of collapse; a few months earlier Ramdane Abbane, one of the Front's leaders, had been executed by his rivals after a mock trial. It looked a good occasion to deliver the knockout blow.

Weakened on the battlefield and alarmed by a referendum that looked likely to be a success for de Gaulle, the FLN had nevertheless regained the political initiative. Meeting at Cairo on 19 September 1958, the leaders of the rebellion announced the creation of a provisional government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), headed by Ferhat Abbas. The FLN's clear intention was to show that its dealings with France would be on a state-to-state basis. De Gaulle, it should be noted, did not reject the interlocutor with whom he was now faced; but he was determined to ensure that any negotiation should take place on terms that he laid down and spelled out in his press conference of 23 October. Convinced that the FLN was finished as a fighting force and that its leaders were looking for an honourable way out, de Gaulle also refused to consider the GPRA as a legitimate representative body, and offered the rebels a form of surrender – the warriors'



peace – that would allow them to yield without loss of face: ‘I have spoken of a “warriors’ peace”. What does that mean? Simply this: that those who started the war should end it and return, without humiliation, to their families and their jobs.’ The rest of his text indicated the practical ways in which the enemy could make contact with French officials. Although French liberals welcomed what they saw as an offer to open negotiations, the FLN flatly rejected what to them looked like a refusal to negotiate.

The ensuing disappointment was all the keener given that those who wanted peace in Algeria had, in the main, seen de Gaulle’s speech as a window of opportunity which could be opened wider once the fighting had stopped. But, as had already happened during the Guy Mollet government, the FLN regarded any cease-fire before negotiations as giving up its principal resource against France. Yet the credibility of de Gaulle’s propositions was made all the stronger by the fact that the integration policy was accompanied by measures aimed at reducing the power of its most determined supporters, the committees of public safety and the civilian and military activists.

### *The affirmation of State authority*

The question remains open as to whether the integration policy of June to December 1958 actually corresponded to de Gaulle’s real convictions, or whether it reflected his need to keep the Algerian ultras quiet until the time was ripe for him to eliminate them. He pursued the latter aim with impressive consistency, even as he was laying down his directives for Algeria’s future. It is true that he could not ignore the criticisms that the initial moves of his government provoked in Algeria. First among these was the presence in the government of representatives of the parties of the Fourth Republic – Léon Delbecq made clear on 3 June that the government was not to the taste of the protagonists of 13 May. The same day de Gaulle came under pressure from General Salan, who tried to prevent him from bringing two ministers identified with the defunct regime, Max Lejeune and Louis Jacquinot, with him on his first voyage to Algeria. Though de Gaulle ignored Salan’s pressure, the two ministers were treated in an insulting way, being kept under close surveillance by detachments of parachutists and subsequently detained and locked in a room in Government House. De Gaulle appeared not to take the incident seriously, but could not ignore such a deliberate challenge to the State. Even less could he ignore the demands of the European crowds, who shouted out ‘Soustelle Soustelle’ at Constantine and Oran (where they irritated de Gaulle so much that he told them to shut up), and the activities of the public safety committees who busied themselves distributing tracts and organising demonstrations to force the prime minister to ‘form a government of public



safety, dismiss all the ministers and put an end to the regime'. De Gaulle responded vigorously to the activists' attempts to dictate his policy. At the Oran prefecture he indicated to the committees of public safety that 'it was not their place to substitute themselves for the competent authorities or to trespass on their responsibilities', telling the spokesman of the local committee that 'the revolution must stop'. When he left Algeria on 6 June, de Gaulle gave Salan a letter appointing him both government delegate general for Algeria and its commander-in-chief, but also indicating that Salan would henceforth be directly responsible to him since de Gaulle was taking direct charge of Algerian affairs. Salan was instructed to ensure the re-establishment of lawful authority and to prevent any interference in the powers of the competent authorities by the committees 'which had spontaneously emerged' (*Lettres, notes et carnets, Juin 1958-décembre 1960*, p. 21).

De Gaulle's determination to get the committees under control was highlighted by the mass of notes, letters and messages he sent to the various responsible authorities in France and Algeria, ordering them to bring the committees to heel. Thus he was angered to learn, just after his first visit to Algeria, that the Algiers Committee of Public Safety had passed a motion requesting him to repeal the framework law and to suppress the political parties. His reply took the form of a curt note to Salan who was instructed to exercise tighter control over his subjects: 'Concerning the regrettable and excessive incident provoked by the peremptory motion of the Algiers Committee of Public Safety, I must remind you that this committee has no right, and no role, other than that of expressing, under your control, the opinions of its members. The regular authorities – and yourself in particular – should take no part in whatever it is that this committee or any other political organisation may express or demand' (*ibid.*, p. 24).

The fact that in the following days numerous texts with identical orders were drafted shows that the military authorities were slow to follow de Gaulle's instructions. Thus his second visit to Algeria, in early July, was intended at least as much to bring the army into line as to study the military situation. De Gaulle's decision to take with him, alongside the Armed Forces Minister Pierre Guillaumat and the Ex-Servicemen's Minister, Edmond Michelet, Guy Mollet, the symbol of the loathed Fourth Republic, was a clear challenge to the ultras. At Algiers, de Gaulle refused to meet the Committee of Public Safety and enjoined the military to end its involvement in politics telling them that 'the time for slogans is over'. Yet at the same time he could not ignore the officers' unwillingness to give up their administrative, social, health and political responsibilities, which had gradually turned Algeria into a military province, and to limit themselves to their official functions. He was also unable to obtain the dismissal of Colonel Lacheroy, responsible for the army's propaganda services, who did not hesitate to censor ministerial declarations of which he disapproved,



including one in early July in which Malraux tacitly acknowledged the existence of torture in Algeria. It thus became clear to de Gaulle that no concerted policy would be possible in Algeria so long as the authority of the State remained uncertain – and that meant bringing the army under control.

This was the task to which de Gaulle applied himself once the referendum result had decisively underpinned his authority. During his fourth visit to Algeria, 2–5 October, he informed Salan that he intended to appoint him to a position more worthy of his talents than that of delegate general. He painted in glowing colours the functions of Inspector General of National Defence, functions which proved to be devoid of content. Seduced by the prospects which de Gaulle dangled in front of him, Salan agreed that his new job should not start until the end of December. Thereafter de Gaulle was free to appoint to Algeria a general less committed to the ultras and the activist officers. And what this new commander was required to do was spelled out in the clearest possible manner by the instructions sent to General Salan on 13 October concerning the measures to be taken to ensure the fairness of the forthcoming elections.

‘The moment has come for the military to cease all participation in organisations of a political nature . . . I order their immediate withdrawal’ (*ibid.*, p. 79) – an order that Salan undertook to carry out. A shaken Massu had to resign the presidency of the Algiers Committee of Public Safety, and throughout Algeria the activists were devastated. On 19 December, Salan flew from Algiers to Paris, convinced that as inspector general of the army he would participate at the highest level in the shaping of France’s military policy. It was only on 10 February that he learned he had been tricked: a decree setting out the duties of the chief of general staff of National Defence abolished the position of inspector general.

With Salan out of the way, de Gaulle was able to reorganise Algeria’s command structure along lines that reflected his concept of the authority of the State. The offices of delegate general and commander-in-chief were henceforth separated. The post of delegate general representing the government in the three Algerian departments was given to Paul Delouvrier, a senior civil servant known for his liberal views, and also, principally, as an expert in economic affairs. Salan was succeeded as head of the army by his former deputy, the air force general Maurice Challe, who put into effect the offensive strategy against the FLN bastions that de Gaulle had counselled, while at the same time maintaining the containment policy that had proved its worth. By the time de Gaulle entered the Elysée on 9 January, he could reasonably believe that the restoration of State authority which he had effected in Algeria was sufficiently entrenched for him to be able to embark upon further initiatives.



*Stage two: self-determination (January 1959–June 1962)*

Algeria's European population was entitled to feel confident about its future when the New Year – and the new Republic – began. Had not the delegate general declared on his arrival at Algiers that 'France is here to stay'? And did not the implementation of the Challe Plan show the government's determination to put an end to the rebellion? An even more encouraging sign of the determination to preserve the thirteen departments within the nation was the appointment of Michel Debré, a committed supporter of French Algeria, as prime minister of the Fifth Republic. There was, it is true, a difference in tone between the sibylline declarations of the president of the Republic (he stated in his 25 March press conference that 'the future of Algeria is an open question and will depend on the votes of its people') and the more overtly integrationist assertions of his prime minister; but the supporters of integration had every right to believe that the policy laid down in the second half of 1958 was still valid. Those who placed their confidence in Debré's claims were, however, alarmed by the skilfully leaked confidences in which de Gaulle indicated that he had more than one iron in the fire, and that another policy was always possible. Receiving the deputy Pierre Laffont, who was also director of the *Echo d'Oran*, he stated that 'if we don't realise that our grandparents' Algeria is dead, we will die with it'.

Yet what actually led de Gaulle to move on to a new stage was the impasse into which the 1958 policy had now fallen. The success of the Challe Plan was beyond question; but it was equally clear to de Gaulle, who sought a global solution to the crisis, that the political situation remained blocked. The FLN had refused to accept the lessons of its military setbacks and would not consider a 'warriors' peace'. Though militarily weakened, it was winning significant victories on the diplomatic front. In August 1959, the provisional government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) was admitted as a full member of the Monrovia Conference of the nine independent states of Africa which pledged its support for Algerian independence and promised to supply weapons. The autumn session of the United Nations was set to discuss Algeria, and the Commonwealth countries had decided to abstain or to vote against France. In the United States, moreover, opinion was growing that the government should put pressure on France to find a solution to the Algerian problem. President Eisenhower was to make an official visit to France in September. For all de Gaulle's determination not to yield to foreign pressure, he could not be unaware of the damage that Algeria was doing to France's international position. And to this awareness of international opinion was added the evolution of public opinion in France. The movement that favoured negotiations with the FLN as a way of ending an unending conflict was growing in strength, and



so too was the weariness of a population whose sons had to spend a part of their military service on the other side of the Mediterranean. Among the political parties, the opposition left demanded the opening of negotiations, but so too did sections of the majority – supporters of a liberal solution could be found within the UNR and the MRP. When de Gaulle sought the opinions of his ministers concerning Algeria on 26 August, he found that although Pierre Guillaumat, Bernard Cornut-Gentile and Jacques Soustelle were integrationists, and that a majority agreed with Michel Debré that it was vital not to make any irrevocable decision, four ministers – Paul Bacon, Pierre Sudreau, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney and André Boulloche – advocated a new Algerian initiative by France. After another visit to Algeria in which he yet again stressed the need for the army's loyalty, de Gaulle delivered a speech on 16 September in which he set out the new principles of his Algerian policy to replace the vague formulae of 1958.

In his speech, de Gaulle solemnly affirmed Algeria's right to self-determination: 'It is, I believe, necessary to proclaim today that self-determination will take place. In the name of France and of the Republic, and by virtue of the authority which the constitution gives me to consult the people, and provided that God grants me life and that the people follow me, I undertake to ask the Algerians of the twelve departments to declare their wishes for their future and the French nation in its entirety to ratify their choice' (note that the reference to 'twelve departments' excluded Sahara from the Algerian territory).

The president of the Republic clarified his intentions further by proposing a date for the intended elections – four years after the end of fighting, which was thus still considered to be a condition. Finally he laid down the terms of the choices which the Algerians would be offered in three formulae: independence, gallicisation, and association of an Algerian-governed Algeria in close union with France.

The 16 September speech was – and was seen to be – of decisive importance: it proclaimed the existence of a specific Algerian entity; it recognised the right of the Algerian nation to organise itself into a state; and it did not rule out the possibility of independence, even though de Gaulle described it as secession and painted an apocalyptic portrait of its consequences – 'appalling poverty, terrible political chaos, mass slaughter, followed quickly by an aggressive communist dictatorship'. He did not choose directly between integration and association, but by his use of the word 'gallicisation' he clearly signalled that the former was impractical. No one could be under any illusion: de Gaulle's own choice was for association, of the sort for which the French community provided the model (see chapter 7).

The speech was well received by a section of French opinion, by the centre parties (MRP, radicals) and by the Gaullists. Welcomed also by



France's allies (the United States of America and the United Kingdom), and by the moderate elements among the African and Asian states, it restored France's freedom of international movement. It did not, however, prevent the United Nations from debating the Algerian question on 30 November 1959 in the absence of France's representative. And in fact the turning-point of 16 September caused de Gaulle a series of difficulties which indicated clearly that even though the proclamation of self-determination constituted a decisive step in his Algerian policy, the application of the principle was not going to open the door to peace in Algeria.

*Self-determination challenged: French Algeria's supporters say 'no' and the week of the barricades*

The 16 September proclamation of the principle of self-determination served to confirm the suspicions and fears of the supporters of French Algeria, reactions that were strengthened by de Gaulle's double-edged remarks, his cunningly dropped confidences, and the rumours that he allowed to spread. Ever since the aftermath of 13 May, when it became clear that de Gaulle did not intend to have his policy dictated to him by the Algiers activists, the latter had been unsure of how far he would distance himself from them. Yet, at the beginning of 1960, the defenders of French Algeria formed a highly disparate group whose political beliefs and potential strategies were in no sense uniform. The group's base was made up of members of the lower-middle class, salaried and independent, whose standard of living was modest; to them Algerian independence would mean the loss of a social status that raised them above the mass of 'Arabs'. Although a small number of wealthy settlers and businessmen took on the role of spokesmen for this group, it derived its strength from the deeply held majority view that independence would lead to an intolerable upheaval in the social hierarchy, and that the French Algerians would no longer be at home in a land which they regarded as theirs to rule. Such was the profound belief of all those who, in Algeria and in mainland France, made themselves the political defenders of French Algeria. In the front rank of these were the 'ultras' of Algeria, a heterogeneous group of varied origins whose hostility to de Gaulle was matched by an even stronger aversion to the Republic and to the basic principles of republicanism. Examples include Robert Martel, a settler from Mitidja and founder of the Union française d'Afrique du Nord which dreamed of a state ruled by the principles of integrist catholicism and established by force; the café-owner Ortiz and the restaurant-owner Goutailler, conscripts from Poujadism; Dr Lefèvre, a fervent admirer of Salazar and his regime; the president of the students' association, Pierre Lagaillarde; Crespin, Maître Baille, and so on. In normal times such people would have stayed on the fringes of politics;



but the very radicalism of their opposition gave them an audience, thanks to the absolute nature of the Europeans' rejection of a negotiated solution. Yet if they were capable of mobilising the crowds for mass action, they were wholly unable to articulate a political strategy. The same could not be said of the army, the core element in the 'French Algeria' movement, and the principal obstacle against which de Gaulle might collide. Once again, however, it is important to be aware of the complexity of the position. The army generals supported the French Algeria for which they were required to fight; but they were concerned for their careers and for the promotions decided by government, and thus proved disciplined and respectful of official orders. The same was true of a number of senior officers for whom the culture of obedience proved stronger than the conviction that their essential task was to keep Algeria within the national community. Large numbers of captains and colonels, by contrast, had a much more detached attitude towards legal authority which they saw as a superficial construction compared with their conception of where duty lay. For some it was a question of ideology. Vanquished and humiliated in Indo-China, they brooded on the reasons for their defeat and came to the conclusion that the Vietminh's success lay in its waging of a 'revolutionary war', the efficiency with which it had controlled the population through propaganda and psychological action. Their goal was to use against the FLN the methods with which the Vietminh had succeeded in the Far East, and which they believed would enable them to win now, so long as their efforts were not wrecked in Paris by the unnecessary scruples or the political designs of government. Examples of this group include Colonel Lacheroy, head of the army's propaganda services and theoretician of the revolutionary war, and colonels Argoud, Trinquier and Gardes. Such men had distrusted de Gaulle from the start, and became openly hostile as soon as he chose the path of self-determination. Some of them began to think that the same crowds that had made de Gaulle in 1958 could now be used to unmake him in a 'day of action' that would establish a 'strong government' in Paris which would stop at nothing to bring the war to a successful conclusion and would silence the intellectuals who ran press campaigns against torture and 'psychological action'. On the mainland, many saw the threat of military Fascism in this group. It had the backing of élite formations (notably a number of parachute regiments), and appeared all the more powerful in that it was incorrectly believed to have the support of the mass of the officer corps, who were indeed strongly committed to French Algeria but for very different reasons, and who had absolutely no sympathy for authoritarian regimes or Fascistic dreams. Since 1956, the task of these officers had been to win over the local populations amongst whom they lived. In this they had some success. They were able to mobilise support and to recruit from the villagers an auxiliary military force, the harkis; they also provided



health and social services, and ran literacy campaigns for their communities. Many felt a personal commitment to the Muslims whom they had promised to protect, and they regarded self-determination – with its probable consequence of independence – as tantamount to the abandonment of their people and the renunciation of a mission to which they had devoted themselves without reserve. For these men self-determination induced a profound crisis of conscience which in turn led them to lend an attentive ear to those of their colleagues who were ready to cross the Rubicon of a new 13 May.

If Algeria provided a favourable terrain for all kinds of activism, the mainland too had its networks of French Algeria supporters; more limited and isolated, such groups could none the less count on the expressions of public opinion that had flourished in spring 1958. In the first place, there was the undoubted support for the attitude of the Algerian army felt by the officers of the mainland army, many of whom had served – or would shortly serve – across the Mediterranean. In the world of politics, the noisy agitation of the Fascistically minded grouplets of the extreme right – for example, *Jeune Nation* (dissolved in May 1958) and its successor the *Parti nationaliste*, the remnants of Poujadism organised in the *Front national des combattants* and a series of organisations that came and went from month to month – were less significant than the very real support that French Algeria enjoyed in the established political class and all its components. A majority of the independents were, like Roger Duchet and Antoine Pinay, favourable to the continuation of French Algeria, and so too were many Gaullists including Léon Delbecque, Jacques Soustelle and even the prime minister, Michel Debré. Similar views were held by those Christian Democrats who supported Georges Bidault and by such veterans of left-wing radicalism as Maurice Viollette and Albert Bayet. (As governor general of Algeria in the 1930s, Viollette had pursued a highly reformist policy which culminated in the Blum–Viollette plan, the only attempt at integration in the whole history of the Third Republic; Bayet was a long-established champion of the union of the left.) The cause of French Algeria was defended in socialist circles by Paul Rivet, a living symbol of the Popular Front, and by Robert Lacoste and Max Lejeune. For them, the goal was the preservation of the heritage of the Jacobin Republic, that beacon for overseas peoples of civilisation and republican virtues.

Among these supporters of integration the announcement of self-determination provoked a variety of reactions, ranging from perplexed doubt to indignant rejection and a feeling of revolt. Backed by the *Rassemblement pour l'Algérie française*, created just after de Gaulle's speech by the mainland supporters of French Algeria around Roger Duchet, Georges Bidault, the UNR deputies Arrighi, Biaggi and Thomazo, together with the Algerian deputies, eleven Algerian associations came together on 30



October to demand a vote of no confidence in the government and its replacement by an authoritarian political order in Paris. Patriotic organisations like the ex-servicemen's Comité d'entente des anciens combattants also started to agitate. Various plots were hatched and rumours swirled around the corridors of power and newspaper editorial offices. It was said that in Paris forty deputies were about to quit the UNR for the independents under the leadership of Delbecque and Soustelle (in the event nine did so on 11 October), that demonstrations would take place in Algiers, and so on. In fact the mountain proved to be a molehill; but in Algiers tension was at boiling point and the smallest incident risked detonating an explosion.

On 18 January 1960 it arrived. The German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an interview with General Massu, the commander of the Algiers army corps, in which he said that the army no longer understood de Gaulle's policy, that a section of it regretted having brought him back to power and was pushing the settlers to create paramilitary forces which it was supplying with weapons. Despite the hasty denials of both Massu and the delegate general Delouvrier, the interview came as a bombshell. Massu was recalled to Paris and stripped of his functions on 23 January, a decision which set the powder keg alight. In Algiers a general strike was called for 24 January, and two of the activists' leaders, Pierre Lagailarde and Joseph Ortiz, decided to use the occasion to bring about the 'anti-de Gaulle 13 May' of their dreams. Pierre Lagailarde and a few dozen student supporters took over the university which they turned into an armed redoubt, and Joseph Ortiz, installed in the centre of Algiers, attempted to win over the military to the idea of an armed take-over which he hoped to organise at the end of the demonstration. Despite the warnings of the delegate general Delouvrier, who tried to defuse the movement, the 24 May demonstration led to barricades being erected in Algiers. During the evening pitched battles took place between gendarmes and demonstrators, leaving twenty dead and nearly two hundred wounded. Algiers was in a virtual state of insurrection, the parachutists signalled that they would not fire on the demonstrators, and scenes of fraternisation took place between the latter and the forces of order who were supposed to be controlling them. Since the situation in Algiers was out of hand, it was clear that a solution could only come from Paris. During the night of 24–25 January, de Gaulle appealed to the insurgents to give up their action. His appeal was unsuccessful. So too was the lightning visit Debré paid to Algiers, during which he clashed with the military and from which he returned to Paris in despair and on the point of resignation. The prime minister's disarray mirrored that of the whole government. In his determination to break the insurrection by force, de Gaulle did not have the support of all his ministers. If Malraux, Sudreau, Buron, Joxe and Jeanneney backed him, Soustelle, Cornut-Gentile



and Triboulet were against any use of force, and Soustelle even offered to negotiate with the rebels. Faced with the difficulties of the situation, de Gaulle took the advice of General Crépin, Massu's successor at Algiers, who advised him not to give the order to fire if he wanted to keep the loyalty of the army and at the same time to reassure it by declaring that no negotiations would take place with the FLN. Thereafter de Gaulle regained the initiative and decided on his course of action. General Ely, the army chief of staff, was sent to Algiers to reassure the officers, while General Challe and Paul Delouvrier left Algiers for Reghaia (thirty kilometres away) so that the legal authorities would be beyond the reach of the insurrection. From Reghaia the delegate general made a moving appeal which made a deep impression on sections of the Algiers population. The decisive act, however, occurred on 29 January when de Gaulle appeared on television, in military uniform. He reaffirmed his commitment to continue with the policy of self-determination, condemned the opposition of both the FLN and the barricade builders, sought to reassure the European settlers of the solidity of France's links with Algeria, and forcefully reminded the military of their duty of loyalty. Deprived of all hope of success by the refusal of the army and the Muslims to give their support, the rebels surrendered on 1 February to army officers who allowed Lagaille's men to leave with military honours and join fighting units, and who also turned a blind eye to Ortiz's flight.

De Gaulle thus emerged victorious, but the week of the barricades clarified a situation that had been unclear ever since 13 May. The balance sheet of this period enables one to weigh up the prospects and the problems of self-determination. The policy clearly brought de Gaulle massive support in mainland France where public opinion was appalled by the Algerian insurrection and grateful to him for his firmness. Yet the uprising also showed that the majority backing the president was a very imperfect representation of the majority which provided his parliamentary support as reflected in his government. On 1 February, the trade unions called a one-hour strike in his support. The following day, the parliamentary left (with the exception of the communists) joined with the UNR, the MRP and a section of the independents in voting special powers to the government. The Right and the extreme Right provided the majority of the seventy-five deputies (and thirty-nine senators) who opposed the decision. Jacques Soustelle's removal from the government and the creation of an opposition on the Right showed that the political landscape was shifting.

In Algeria the failure of the 'anti-13 May' demonstrated to both activists and Europeans that the Fifth Republic was not the Fourth, and that the pretensions of a handful of activists to dictate policy to Paris were founded on a highly unrealistic grasp of the realities of power. And yet it was obvious to all that if the failure of the barricades was due principally to the



army's refusal to come out in favour of the insurgents, it had also refused to fight them. Thus the army remained central to the politics of Algeria. De Gaulle was sufficiently conscious of this to make another journey to Algeria in early March – the famous 'visit to the messes' – in which he sought to reassure the military. In discussions with the officers he endeavoured to convince them of the rightness of his policy, and coined the dramatic phrase 'an Algerian Algeria linked to France' to describe the aim of an alternative solution to the impossibility of a French Algeria and the chaos that would follow independence.

In a trial of strength with the supporters of French Algeria, de Gaulle had imposed the continuation of his policy of self-determination. But he had made no progress in achieving the conditions – a cease-fire – that were the *sine qua non* of its implementation.

#### *The disappointments of self-determination: the FLN refusal*

By acknowledging the existence of the Algerian identity, insisted upon by the FLN as the absolute basis for any negotiation, the speech of 16 September marked an incontestable advance on the political declarations made by de Gaulle since 13 May. Yet it offered the Algerian forces no advance on the long-standing 'warriors' peace', and denied the provisional government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) any right to a privileged position in the representation of the Algerians in any future negotiations. The most that the GPRA was promised was the liberty to participate on equal terms to those available to other Algerians in the future referendum on self-determination. Thus the FLN reply to the 16 September speech, while noting the acknowledgement of Algeria's right to choose its destiny, refused to accept that the country's future should be subordinated to a vote of the French people, and declared that the only way to achieve peace was through negotiation with the GPRA.

The French government was by now determined to bring the conflict to the speediest conclusion possible, and did not let matters stand still. Declarations by the Foreign Minister Couve de Murville to an American television channel, and by the prime minister Debré to the National Assembly, and then an appeal by de Gaulle himself in his 10 November 1959 press conference, appealed to the 'leaders of the insurrection' (the word 'rebel' was no longer used) to discuss with the authorities the conditions of an honourable peace. Either because it thought it held the initiative in the run-up to the 30 November opening of the United Nations debate, or because it was suspicious of a French government that was strengthening its military pressure on the battlefield, the GPRA responded with what amounted to a new refusal: on 20 November it designated as its negotiators Ben Bella and his co-detainees imprisoned in Fresnes since



October 1956. The GPRA knew perfectly well that France could not accept this demand. Once again the dialogue was broken.

It was publicly re-opened, for a third time, by de Gaulle in his speech of 14 June; and this time de Gaulle had reason to believe that he would be listened to. Since March 1960 contact had been established between one of the leaders of the FLN, Si Salah, head of *wilaya* 4 (one of the military provinces of the FLN) and representatives of the French government (Bernard Tricot, the Elysée adviser, and Colonel Mathon, a member of the prime minister's military office). Si Salah wanted information on the conditions of a possible cease-fire. In June 1960 he and his lieutenants were received in secret by de Gaulle at the Elysée and the ensuing discussion was promising. Thus it was to acknowledge publicly his proposals that de Gaulle made a fresh appeal for negotiations in his 14 June speech and reminded the GPRA of his earlier undertakings on self-determination (the way the barricades week ended proved his point) and free elections.

Once again, however, things went wrong, due in the first place to the fact that the Si Salah card turned out to be a loser. Disagreements within his command structure led to some bloody settling of scores and eventually to his own physical elimination, in conditions which remain obscure. Secondly, the FLN decision to respond positively to de Gaulle's offer was primarily determined by a concern not to be seen by international opinion to be rejecting every opening. By proposing to send a delegation headed by Ferhat Abbas to meet de Gaulle, the FLN signalled that it regarded the issue as one to be negotiated by states of equal status – the GPRA would represent the Algerian case. Negotiations fell at the first hurdle. On their arrival at Melun on 25 June in preparation for Ferhat Abbas' visit, Maître Boumendjel and Ben Yahia realised that the French regarded them as rebels with whom discussion would be limited to the end of hostilities. France proposed to negotiate the future status of Algeria with all sectors of Algerian opinion and had no intention of giving any special position to the FLN. Negotiations broke down completely on 29 June; the antagonism between the two sides remained complete. Two years after de Gaulle's return to power the Algerian crisis looked as insoluble as ever, despite the fact that it was the overriding problem for a government that increasingly regarded the conflict across the Mediterranean as an intolerable obstacle to the vast projects which its leader was pondering. Given that the FLN was now stiffening its position (after the failure of Melun, Ferhat Abbas declared that the FLN must intensify its struggle and its armed combat on the grounds that 'independence must be seized since it will not be given'), the only way out of the impasse was for de Gaulle to make further concessions.



*Stage three: the Algerian Republic ( June 1960–June 1961 )*

In early summer 1960, the position regarding Algeria's future was that de Gaulle had acknowledged the existence of an Algerian entity whose future would be determined by universal suffrage. He had also broken definitively with the hopes of the partisans of French Algeria, who had played – and lost – their trump card in the week of the barricades, by tracing the outline of an 'Algerian Algeria' whose contours, though ill-defined, were clearly distinct from those of metropolitan France. Yet there was still no question of handing over the future of Algeria to the FLN. The most it could expect was to take its place among the other political forces of Algeria. Once the FLN had rejected the offer made at Melun, de Gaulle appears to have made up his mind: he decided to proceed with his own solution in summer 1960 and to ignore the rebels. Thus a decree was published on 19 July announcing the creation of 'elected commissioners' whose task was to act as representatives of the population to the governor general. The government hoped they would come to form a 'third force' – located between the partisans of French Algeria and those of independence – with which it would be possible to construct an Algerian Algeria that stayed linked to France. The plan, however, was stillborn, raising a storm of protest against an arrangement which satisfied neither the supporters of French Algeria nor the champions of independence. Indeed, after Melun, the government found itself exposed to a series of attacks from all political quarters.

Foremost amongst these attacks was that of the FLN, which reacted with extreme brutality against what it saw as an attempt to eliminate it. The GPRA intensified its international campaign to obtain the condemnation of a France that was becoming ever more isolated – criticised by the socialist and Arab states, held in suspicion by the United Nations, it enjoyed only tepid support from the United States and Great Britain. In Algeria itself there was a resurgence of attacks on the European population and on those Muslims who did not pledge allegiance to the FLN. Out of conviction – or fear – the majority of Muslims were now in the FLN.

There then followed an upsurge in activity by the army, which saw in the situation confirmation of the rightness of its pacification work and was more than ever determined to crush the FLN. General Crépin, who had replaced Challe as head of the army in Algeria, came himself to support the cause of French Algeria. Given that the majority of the European population were active supporters of the latter, this meant that the attitude of the army remained the great unknown factor in the equation. On 16 June the Front de l'Algérie française was formed in Algiers under the presidency of *bachaga* Boualem, a vice-president of the National Assembly. It soon claimed 100,000 members. The situation in Algiers was as explosive in



autumn 1960 as it had been in January. In mainland France, an equally radical opposition separated the die-hard supporters of French Algeria from the no less determined advocates of independence. The day after the 14 June speech, Georges Bidault and Jacques Soustelle took the lead in creating the Vincennes Committee which brought together prominent figures from the Left (Robert Lacoste, Albert Bayet), the Radical Party (Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury) and the Christian Democrats (Paul Coste-Floret), as well as from the Right. The members of the committee took an oath to defend the integrity of the national territory, to oppose any negotiations and to reject an Algerian Algeria in favour of an Algeria fully integrated into the Republic. In the other camp, the episcopate came out against the supporters of French Algeria in a declaration that, though moderate in tone, was firm in substance, and the Left hardened its opposition to the war. With the exception of the Communist Party, which since 1956 had opted for Algerian independence, the political parties lagged behind the trade unions and the intellectuals. The students' union, UNEF, became the spearhead of an opposition which demanded negotiations with the FLN and protested violently against the use of torture by the army. The trial of a communist journalist, Henri Alleg, who had denounced in *La Question* the torture he had undergone and the disappearance in Algiers of Maurice Audin, an extreme Left member of the university, deepened the unease of the Left intellectuals who fought to end the conflict. Others went further and did not hesitate to give direct support to the FLN, whose auxiliaries they became. In September 1960 the trial opened of the Jeanson network, an FLN support group whose leader had fled to Switzerland. For the intellectuals of the Left, the trial posed the fundamental question of what moral justification there could be for a war fought by a country that claimed to be the homeland of the rights of man against a nation that sought to become an independent state. The response of some came on 6 September, after the opening of the Jeanson trial, in the 'Manifesto of the 121', in which professors and writers proclaimed the right to disobedience and desertion in an Algerian war that went against their principles.

Thus the prolongation of the war deepened the tensions within France itself. It led to a worsening of political disagreements and to the weakening of the image of an administration caught between two stools and prey to the twin assaults of those who insisted on negotiations, and those who were equally determined to prevent them. It is clear that de Gaulle's determination since June 1960 not to alter his position had led to a deterioration of the situation which was in turn damaging to the authority of the government. In November and December 1960 he unleashed a series of spectacular initiatives in order to open up the situation and hence regain the political upper hand. The Algerian question thereby entered a new phase



which succeeded in unblocking the obstacles in place since early 1960 – but at the cost of new concessions by France.

The first of these dramatic gestures was the radio and television broadcast of 4 November 1960 in which de Gaulle chose to relaunch the dynamic of negotiation. Rejecting ‘the two silent enemies that are sterile immobilism and vulgar abandon’ he went a little further than before in setting out the future shape of the Algeria that he had described in speech after speech. ‘We mean an emancipated Algeria, an Algeria where responsibility will belong to the Algerians, an Algeria which will . . . possess its own government, its own institutions and laws.’ At one moment he referred also to an ‘Algerian Republic’. It was a decisive turning-point. De Gaulle had at last revealed that the political entity, whose shape he had hitherto refrained from describing, would be not only a state, but an independent state. The fact that he henceforth regarded the Algerian question as distinct from all other national problems was shown by the creation on 22 November of a Ministry of State for Algerian Affairs, entrusted to the Gaullist loyalist Louis Joxe, who was Debré’s education minister. To carry out this new policy, spelled out on 4 November, de Gaulle appointed a new team in Algeria, with the Haute-Garonne prefect Jean Morin replacing Delouvrier as delegate general, and General Gambiez replacing Crépin as the head of the Algerian armed forces.

The new policy initiative was accompanied by a further – and final – visit of de Gaulle to Algeria from 9 to 13 December 1960. He wanted to gauge the mood of the Algerian population on the eve of a watershed which would culminate in the creation of an independent Algerian Republic. The planned itinerary avoided Algiers and the other big cities where the FAF-controlled Europeans now regarded de Gaulle as the man to destroy and had made their feelings known by shouting down the delegate general Delouvrier during the Armistice Day ceremonies. Throughout his visit de Gaulle could not but be aware that Algeria was split in two – the Muslims cheered him or chanted ‘Algeria for the Algerians’, while the Europeans responded with cries of ‘French Algeria’. In Algiers itself, where young demonstrators clashed violently with the security forces on 9 and 10 November, a demonstration on the 11th saw the Muslims brandishing the green and white flag superimposed with the red crescent of the FLN and chanting the song of the resistance fighters. The two communities clashed bloodily with each other, with the army and the CRS. The acceleration of events in Algeria thus put further pressure on de Gaulle to find a solution before events took on the proportions of a catastrophe. Yet before embarking on the final stages of a negotiation that had become essential, de Gaulle needed to have his legitimacy reaffirmed at the source from which it had been derived ever since 1958 – universal suffrage. His 4 November press conference had indicated that the people would be consulted. A referendum was arranged for 8 January 1961. In theory, the electors were



asked to approve the principle of self-determination, and a provisional project for the organisation of public powers in Algeria (done in order to respect article 11 of the constitution which reserved the use of referenda for constitutional questions). But the real purpose of the referendum was to obtain approval for de Gaulle's Algerian policy (in particular the principle of an Algerian Republic), and to give him the necessary authority to negotiate in the face of the FLN, the army, the Algerian population and the activists. The blank cheque that de Gaulle sought was granted by the UNR, the socialists and the MRP. The independents were hopelessly split between those, led by Roger Duchet, who supported French Algeria, and those who agreed with Paul Reynaud that negotiation was the right policy; as a result the party made no recommendation. A 'no' vote was advocated by the communists, who refused to express confidence in the head of state, the radicals, the far Right, the French Algeria supporters whom Jacques Soustelle attempted to bring together in National Grouping for the Unity of the Republic, Marshal Juin, and so on. The response of the electorate was unambiguous. If 23.5 per cent of the voters abstained, 75 per cent of those who went to the polls granted de Gaulle the authority he needed to put an end to the war in Algeria. But this massive approbation carried with it the seeds of divorce between mainland France and Algeria. The 'no' vote, which averaged 30 per cent in the Algerian departments, reached 72 per cent in Algiers City, where the bulk of the Europeans lived. It was by now clear that the negotiations which de Gaulle was preparing to open would have to take place against the opposition of the European population of Algeria – on whom a successful outcome would have to be imposed.

The reactions of the champions of French Algeria to the policy initiatives of November–December 1960 were significant. The day after the 4 November speech, the secretary general of the administration in Algeria submitted his resignation. From Madrid, whence he had fled, General Salan let it be known that he was preparing a riposte. In the winter of 1960–1, civilian and military activists decided to create a clandestine parliamentary organisation, the Organisation armée secrète (OAS), whose aim was to oppose by force any negotiation with the FLN. The OAS published its first tracts in February 1961, and embarked on a series of attacks against those whom it suspected of supporting the FLN or of preparing to negotiate with them. It was thus in the context of mounting opposition to de Gaulle's Algerian policy that there occurred the most dramatic challenge to the authority of the youthful Fifth Republic – the generals' putsch.

#### *The generals' putsch (22–25 April 1961)*

The most obvious outcome of the series of initiatives taken by de Gaulle in November–December 1960 was the start of a negotiation process (to be



discussed later) which was supposed to be secret but leaked out as a result of indiscretions and press rumours. A determination to smash this newly created dynamic led the activist colonels Argoud, Broizat, Lacheroy, Godard and Gardes, amongst others, who had been transferred to the mainland after the barricades week, to contemplate a military putsch that would bring over the whole of the Algerian army and would force the political authorities to change tack and de Gaulle to quit. The colonels put forward General Challe, commander-in-chief of Allied forces in central Europe, as head of the operation, since he alone among his colleagues had sufficient prestige to carry it out successfully. After some hesitation, Challe requested early retirement on 22 January 1961 and decided to go ahead with the scheme. He could rely on the backing of General André Zeller, a former chief of the general staff, and of General Jouhaud, the former air chief in Algeria who had just announced his resignation. He was also guaranteed the loyalty of a number of élite units (such as the First Parachute Regiment which was responsible for Algiers) and could hope that many others would also come over.

During the night of 21–22 April, the First Parachute Regiment under Commandant Denoix de Saint Marc seized the strategic points of Algiers without meeting any serious resistance. The parachutists arrested General Gambiez, the commander-in-chief, who had tried to intervene, together with the Algiers chief of police and General Vezinet, commander of the Algiers army corps. Once Government House had been secured, the rebels placed under guard the delegate general Jean Morin and his family, and also the Minister for Public Works, Robert Buron, who happened to be visiting Algiers. Generals Challe, Zeller, Jouhaud and Salan (who arrived from Spain on 23 April) were the masters of Algiers. They regarded their action as strictly military and refused all contact with civilian activists and with the OAS. But the hoped-for flood of supporters did not materialise and the four generals met with a 'wait and see' attitude from their colleagues. The proclamation of a state of siege and the publication of victorious communiqués could not compensate for the prudence of the officers, nor for a response which they had apparently not expected – the hostility of the conscript soldiers. Following the unfolding events on their transistor radios, the conscripts made no attempt to conceal their loyalty to the legal powers and their vigorous support for the officers who refused to join the uprising.

While the Algerian army was showing unexpected lethargy (despite the enthusiasm of the civilian population), the government was able to count on massive support in mainland France. With the exception of the CNIP, whose silence was seen as support for the putsch, all the political forces condemned it without reservation. The UNR and the MRP did so to affirm their support for de Gaulle; the SFIO and the trade unionists to call for the



mobilisation of the workers against the putschists in a one-hour general strike on Tuesday 25 April; and the communists to launch the idea of 'anti-Fascist committees' which would regroup all the democratic forces. Public opinion, as well as the organised parties, was firmly behind the head of state. Prime Minister Debré's midnight appeal to the French on 23 April to go to the airports and prevent a possible landing of the parachutists produced a strong emotional response.

But it was, once again, a speech by de Gaulle that proved decisive in defeating the generals' putsch. Appearing in uniform on television at 8 p.m. on 23 April, he denounced in a few contemptuous phrases the actions of the generals in Algiers:

An insurrectionary power has established itself in Algeria on the basis of a military pronunciamiento ... This power has a façade – a quartet of retired generals – and it has a reality – a group of politicised, ambitious and frenzied officers. The competence which this group and quartet possess is as limited as it is short term. But fanaticism deforms their perception and understanding of the Nation and the world.

There followed a series of orders to which any resistance was impossible. 'In the name of France I order that all means, I repeat all means, be used to bar the route to these men until such time as they are overcome. I forbid every Frenchman, and in the first place every soldier, to carry out any of their orders.' Finally, de Gaulle decided to invoke article 16 of the constitution which enables the president, in times of grave crisis, to take the necessary exceptional measures.

This powerful speech, menacing for the rebels ('The fate of the usurpers cannot be other than that which the law in its rigour provides'), was to lead within hours to the collapse of the generals' putsch. The 'wait and see' officers, who were the majority, were strengthened in their resolve not to get involved. The conscripts were willing to disobey the 'Challists', and some of them took control of armaments depots. The navy stayed loyal and the air force flew back to the mainland to avoid becoming the instrument of an airborne landing. By 24 April it was clear that the only force upon which the four generals could rely was that of the European crowds who cheered them in the Algiers forum. But, as professional soldiers, they had never contemplated a mass uprising, only a military putsch. Considering that the game was up, General Challe – soon followed by General Zeller – chose to surrender on the 25th; the two men were joined in prison by most of the parachutist officers. Salan, Jouhaud and the officers who had organised the pronunciamiento went underground to continue their struggle in the ranks of the OAS, which was thereby strengthened. The way was now clear for the final stage of de Gaulle's policy – negotiations leading to independence (a word which had hitherto been taboo). For the



opponents of this policy also, there was now only one solution, the series of murderous and desperate actions which the OAS unleashed and which formed the ultimate, and hopeless, barrier to an ever more inevitable outcome.

*Stage four: negotiation and independence*

In February 1961, after the 4 November speech and the referendum on self-determination, contacts were established between the representatives of the French government, Georges Pompidou and Bruno de Leusse, and delegates of the FLN. Though the desire of both sides to reach a successful conclusion was evident, considerable obstacles to a settlement remained. The FLN intended to limit the discussions to the organisation of self-determination, and refused to discuss anything else until Algeria's independence had been recognised and an Algerian government installed. It rejected in particular French requests for a cease-fire to be implemented once negotiations had begun, and for guarantees for the French population of Algeria; and it demanded as a precondition of any talks acknowledgement of the Algerian character of the Sahara.

There now began a series of long and difficult conversations, punctuated by breakdowns and endless preconditions, which in turn were followed by a series of concessions by de Gaulle to keep the momentum of negotiation going. This laborious bargaining process lasted from February 1961 to April 1962. Thus the official announcement of the opening of negotiations only took place once de Gaulle had signalled, at the beginning of March, that he would no longer insist on a cease-fire once they began. The start was further delayed by Louis Joxe's statement that he intended to negotiate with Messali Hadj's Mouvement national algérien (a nationalist movement that predated – and opposed – the FLN), and then by the generals' putsch. It was not until 20 May 1961 that the Evian discussions got underway. They were then broken off by the French government on 13 June in the face of the FLN's refusal to yield on the issues of the Sahara (control of which France wished to retain because of the oil resources which she had begun to exploit) and the dual nationality and special status of the European Algerians. It was once again de Gaulle who gave way. In his press conference of 5 September 1961 he made a major concession by recognising Algerian sovereignty over the Sahara.

Fresh meetings took place to establish the areas of agreement and disagreement, and to prepare the final stages of the negotiations. This time they were hampered by internal disagreements within the FLN that saw, in August 1961, Ferhat Abbas replaced as leader of the provisional government by Ben Khedda, who was regarded as the leader of the Marxist wing of the FLN. Secret talks in Switzerland and then in Les Rousses led to the



establishment of the broad outlines of an agreement which made possible the opening of official negotiations at Evian on 7 March.

During these interminable months of 1961 and 1962 de Gaulle became visibly exasperated by the slowness of the negotiations and by the resistance which he encountered from all sides; his desire to be finished with the matter was obvious. His press conference of 11 April 1961 (before the generals' putsch) stressed the need to speed up the necessary decolonisation of an Algeria that was costing the country too much. In his end-of-year speech of December 1961, he announced his intention to proceed to a military withdrawal, and decided on the recall in the following weeks of two Algerian divisions. The action was consistent with the series of concessions on which he had resolved. It reflected the fact that time was no longer on France's side, and that the Algerian war was causing serious damage to the nation and exacerbating the tensions already described.

The FLN, fully aware during 1961–2 that only a worsening of the existing situation would force France to yield, intensified its military action and multiplied its terrorist attacks. The effect of these tactics was to enrage the military and the activists and to create a reign of terror among the European Algerians who regarded the idea of Algerian independence as the unthinkable abandonment of sovereignty to murderers. From early 1961 terrorism became the weapon of the OAS as well as the FLN. After the generals' putsch, the OAS regarded the French army as an 'army of occupation' on which it had declared war. Its first leaders, the settler Robert Martel and the student Susini, joined forces with the rebel officers who had gone underground after the failure of the April putsch, and as a result the OAS came under the control of the colonel-theoreticians of 'psychological warfare'. Under the nominal authority of General Salan, who presided over the High Command, colonels Gardes and Godard, General Gardy and Susini established an organisation which controlled the cities, in particular Algiers, and mobilised the civilian population in a combat directed against both the FLN and the French government. Henceforth the OAS made massive use of terrorism in its determination to prevent at any price the opening of negotiations. As the prospect of the latter became more real, so the use of terror became systematic, and the OAS struck at Muslim shopkeepers, tax and education officials, policemen and army officers with liberal opinions. Either through conviction or through fear, a substantial majority of the European population lined up behind the OAS, in which it saw the last rampart against independence and which succeeded in penetrating large sectors of the administration. By 1961 it dominated the French community. It had control of Algiers and Oran (through Jouhaud), hunted down all those whom it regarded as hostile to French Algeria, and practised a reign of terror parallel to that of the FLN.



From Algiers the OAS extended its action to France. On 9 September 1961 de Gaulle narrowly escaped an assassination attempt at Pont-sur-Seine. Recruiting amongst the far Right and the military activists who had taken refuge on the mainland, the OAS multiplied its attacks from late 1961, targeting communists and senior civil servants, and placing explosive devices in public buildings and the homes of prominent figures of the regime (an explosion at André Malraux's residence left a small girl permanently blinded). Such actions had the support of a minority of the political nation: in November 1961, eighty members of parliament voted a motion, nicknamed the 'Salan amendment', which urged, as Salan had done, the mobilisation of eight classes of young men in Algeria. Georges Bidault, the president of the Vincennes Committee, emerged as the leader of a political movement which shared the views of the OAS.

Yet the majority of the French rejected OAS pressure. Opinion polls showed that by April 1961, 78 per cent of all French citizens approved the opening of negotiations with the FLN and that 57 per cent were certain that they would result in independence. Between that date and spring 1962, the percentage of those who wanted a French withdrawal from Algeria increased still further; the president's policy clearly responded to the wishes of the majority. De Gaulle even risked being outflanked by the political and trade union Left, which had resented being ignored by him during the April putsch and was now determined to pursue its own independent action so as to force his hand. In the winter of 1961-2, the Left organised a series of mass demonstrations in Paris to protest against the actions of the OAS and to demand peace in Algeria. Despite an official ban, a trade union demonstration on 17 December 1961 brought together between fifteen and twenty thousand people, and another one held on 8 February 1962 ended tragically with the death of eight participants at the Charonne métro station following a police charge. A few days later several hundred thousand people demonstrated at the funeral of the victims. To these events should be added the pro-FLN demonstrations of the Paris Muslims between 17 and 20 October and the ensuing police repression which left one hundred dead.

In both France and Algeria, the prolongation of the conflict created a climate of virtual civil war in which the government was compelled to fight on two fronts. It risked losing all authority and credibility and could keep control of the situation only by a repression that damaged its reputation even further.

It was to escape from this vicious circle that de Gaulle agreed to make concessions to his opponents and urged his negotiators to reach a settlement. The majority of the French people learned with relief on 18 March 1962 of the signing of the Evian agreement which gave independence to Algeria and led to the proclamation by the provisional government of the Algerian Republic of a cease-fire from 19 March.



*The tragic end of French Algeria (March–July 1962)*

The first part of the Evian agreement regulated the conditions under which sovereignty would pass from France to Algeria in the intermediary period between the cease-fire and the vote on self-determination. The political and military detainees were to be liberated within twenty days; the French army would remain in Algeria for three years and together with the Algerian Liberation Army (the FLN) would form a joint commission to supervise the application of the cease-fire. At the political level, France was represented by a high commissioner (Christian Fouchet) assisted by the overall commander of French troops in Algeria. But the exercise of power was entrusted principally to a provisional executive of twelve members (nine Muslims and three French under the presidency of a moderate nationalist, Abderhamane Fares) which controlled the administration and the security forces.

Elsewhere the Evian text laid down that the executive would fix the date of the vote on self-determination, while a whole series of other provisions dealt with the future relations between France and an independent Algeria. France obtained the guarantees it sought for its citizens resident in Algeria, and the security of individuals and possessions was promised. The French had three years in which to choose between French and Algerian nationality and if they opted for the latter, France guaranteed their nationality of origin. Those who wished to keep French nationality while remaining in Algeria would have a privileged status. In the economic sphere, Algeria would remain in the franc zone and would receive the aid which had been promised in the Constantine Plan. In return, Algeria guaranteed the property of the Europeans and undertook to indemnify them for any losses suffered. France would also keep its Saharan interests for five years. The military arrangements provided for the presence of the French army over three years, and France would also keep the naval base of Mers el Kebir for a fifteen-year period. And finally, France promised to maintain a technical and cultural presence in Algeria. A civil service presence was also guaranteed under the aegis of the co-operation agreement with the new Algeria.

On the surface, the Evian agreement brought into being de Gaulle's plan for an Algerian Republic linked to France. In reality, France had conceded everything that the FLN had demanded: recognition of its status as sole negotiator; the declaration of Algerian sovereignty; the Algerian nature of the Sahara; and the cease-fire to come after agreement had been reached. All that France obtained in return were uncertain – and short-term – guarantees whose effectiveness depended on their being respected by the two sides who signed the agreement. And France had no real assurance that this respect would be forthcoming.



The agreement also needed to be ratified by the population and accepted by the French residents of Algeria. On the first point de Gaulle announced that the nation would be consulted by referendum on 8 April. It would be asked to approve the Evian agreement and also to give the president of the Republic the authority to enact ordinances which would put it into effect. As always, there was a plebiscitary dimension to the referendum which lay in the affirmation that the head of state continued to enjoy the confidence of the French people after the dramatic crises which the country had undergone. In the ensuing campaign only the extreme Right advocated a 'no' vote, and General Salan decided to create a National Resistance Council on the mainland to oppose the implementation of the Evian agreement. With the exception of the PSU, which advocated a wasted vote (by writing on the ballot paper 'yes to peace, no to Gaullist power'), and the CNIP, which in leaving its supporters free to make up their own minds showed that its sympathies lay with the 'noes', all the parties – from the Gaullists to the communists – urged a 'yes' vote. In these conditions, and given the burning desire of most French people for an end to an unending conflict, it was wholly unsurprising that the referendum proposal was overwhelmingly carried. Of the 76.6 per cent who voted, 90 per cent approved the Evian agreement. This massive result (in which Algeria itself did not participate) marked the end of eight years of fighting and France's official withdrawal from the Algerian conflict.

For peace to reign, the fighting had to stop, and immediately after the Evian agreement, the OAS moved to make its implementation impossible. In case the negotiations succeeded, General Salan had prepared a plan for a general uprising involving attacks on the OAS and the mobile gendarmes. Immediately after Evian, the OAS unleashed a general strike of the Europeans and gave the officers until 22 March to join it, failing which they would be regarded as the agents of a foreign power. On 22 March the OAS decided to turn the working-class district of Bab el Oued into a rebel zone; commandos took up position in the area and sought to disarm the patrols of the conscript soldiers. Six recruits who tried to resist were killed. There followed a massive army intervention with tanks and planes to smash the insurrection. In the face of such determination, the OAS withdrew leaving the population which had supported it exposed to severe reprisals. A few days later, on 26 March, the army fired on a prohibited demonstration organised by the OAS and killed forty-six people. This double failure drove the OAS to actions of despair: it decided to bequeath to the FLN an Algeria reduced to the state in which the French had found it one hundred and thirty years earlier.

Such suicidal tactics plunged the European population of Algeria into a nightmare; the succession of explosions, executions, threats and arrests (the



detention of Jouhaud and then of Salan) raised the spectre of civil war. The coexistence of the two communities, which Evian had planned, proved to be an absolute impossibility. Terror-stricken, realising that the OAS was leading them to disaster, horrified at the prospect of the FLN vengeance that might follow independence and convinced that the only choice was between the 'coffin and the suitcase', the majority of French Algerians chose the latter. In the space of a few weeks, several hundred thousand Europeans fled to mainland France, to Spain or to Israel, abandoning their homes and a land which, for 80 per cent of them, had been their birthplace. In so doing they ignored the threats of the OAS which forbade any departure, set fire to removal vans and to luggage, and threatened reprisals against families and friends. They would have to face considerable difficulties of resettlement, since the government was surprised by such a vast and unforeseen exodus for which it was wholly unprepared. The tragic exodus of the *pied noir* settlers thus brought to a climax the history of a war which, with the passage of time, had taken on the characteristics of a major national trauma.

The massive flight of the settlers, the death sentence passed on Jouhaud and the life sentence given to Salan, deprived the OAS of any hope for the future, and at the end of May it decided to open negotiations with the provisional executive. Susini ordered the attacks to cease, and on 16 June an agreement was signed. On 1 July, after a campaign without violence, 99.72 per cent of the electorate of Algeria – Muslim and European – voted 'yes' in the referendum on the country's independence. On 3 July, de Gaulle recognised the independence of Algeria.

For the Fifth Republic this marked the end of a crisis that had posed a deepening threat to its future. The regime viewed the ending of a war in which France had been so deeply embroiled as a major victory, a judgement with which contemporary public opinion wholeheartedly concurred. Public opinion, like the political parties, accepted the idea that de Gaulle alone had the necessary authority to make the French realise that Algerian independence was the only possible solution to the war – and then to impose that solution on the army and the European population of Algeria.

Should we then conclude that in so doing de Gaulle had put into operation an idea that he had long nurtured, that of 'releasing France from the constraints of Empire'? Closer analysis of the course of his Algerian policy reveals that nothing is less certain. On the contrary, it seems that at every stage de Gaulle weighed up the strength of the opposing forces and took the pragmatic decision to put into effect the solution which seemed the most realistic. It was an approach that led him to a strategy of withdrawal, to a string of concessions and, in the end, to the signing of an agreement which its negotiators regarded as unsatisfactory, even though it had the immediate advantage of bringing the fighting to an end. The agreement



was unable to prevent the massive uprooting of Algeria's French population, an exodus that destroyed any hope of the intercommunal co-existence that would have made the Evian agreement a great historical event. With hindsight, the verdict on the outcome is therefore one of disappointment. Yet de Gaulle's real achievement lay in his ability, in speeches and press conferences, to turn defeat into victory by portraying concessions as bold initiatives and in the use of the magic of his masterful language to cover what was actually a recognition of the inevitable. Thus he inaugurated a method which was destined for a noble future – that of turning acknowledgement of the inevitable into an assertion of political will.

At the time, the end of the Algerian war liberated the Fifth Republic from a paralysing difficulty and enabled its leader to turn to the question of France's place in the world, something which he saw as much more fundamental. In so doing he determined to attend to the institutional implications of the effects of the Algerian war on the balance of power set out in the constitution of 1958.



## The political evolution of the regime and the crisis of 1962

The Algerian drama had profound effects not only on the French but also on the political institutions that had been put into place in 1958. Brought to power by the Algerian war, trusted by the French as the only man capable of bringing it to an end, de Gaulle enjoyed a freedom of manoeuvre that no one appeared able to challenge. His own temperament undoubtedly led him to adopt a maximalist interpretation of the powers given to him by the constitution. His *Memoirs of Hope* contains a passage which is to say the least, surprising, coming as it does from the man who had presided over the making of the constitution. 'The new institutions were in place. How should I, placed at their summit, organise them? The choice was in large part mine. For my arrival at the centre of affairs and the conditions of my action did not derive from constitutional texts' (I, p. 341). As the last sentence indicates, the special circumstance of the Algerian war meant that the head of the executive had to be able to take quick, and on occasion secret, decisions, and that power needed to be concentrated in the hands of a decision-taker who could only be the head of state. No one challenged the necessity of what a large consensus of public, and even political, opinion regarded as a correct arrangement. The result was that between 1958 and 1962, a set of constitutional practices developed which, in strengthening the powers of the presidency, went far beyond the balance of powers laid down in the 1958 text.

### *The strengthening of presidential power*

Even though his position as corner-stone of the institutional structure derived from his election to the Elysée, de Gaulle argued that his power owed less to texts than to the historical mission, which he had held since 1940, to be the saviour of the nation in its moments of peril. 'The content of constitutional clauses could not conceal a reality that was obvious to myself and to everyone else. Whatever particular articles might say, it was to de Gaulle that the French people turned. It was from him that they expected the solution to their difficulties. And for my part, I saw as inherent in my



own being the right and the duty to guarantee the national interest' (*Mémoires d'espoir*, I, p. 342). There could be no clearer evidence that de Gaulle's power was charismatic in nature and in no sense dependent on a text.

It must be admitted that however self-evident this thesis might appear to de Gaulle and to many others, it was difficult to justify in law. Thus de Gaulle's supporters sought to legitimise via the theory of the 'reserved domain' a practice which gave the president of the Republic an effective monopoly of political power. The doctrine of the 'reserved domain' was originally articulated to prevent Jacques Soustelle and the integrationist wing of the UNR turning the latter into an instrument of pressure against de Gaulle's Algerian policy. Albin Chalandon, secretary general of the UNR, told the Orsay meeting of its national council in July 1959 that the Gaullists must resist any temptation to challenge de Gaulle's action and should instead 'follow his lead in all problems in which the national interest is involved and which he reserves to himself as head of the executive'. Chalandon cited in this context international policy, the Community and Algeria. At the Bordeaux conference of the UNR in November 1959, Jacques Chaban-Delmas took up the idea in distinguishing a 'presidential sector', in which he included Algeria, the Community, and foreign affairs and defence, from an 'open sector', which included the other governmental areas (J. Charlot, *L'UNR*, pp. 85-6). Although de Gaulle and his prime ministers always refuted the existence of a reserved domain, it is difficult to deny that the expression reflected the reality which de Gaulle himself asserted and which made him the decision-taker for all the fundamental issues determining the life of the nation.

The result was the creation, around the head of state at the Elysée, of a sort of super private office which, without replacing the government, to a certain degree replicated it. With a total complement of about fifty under the direction of Geoffrey de Courcel, secretary general of the presidency of the Republic from 1959 to 1962, and René Brouillet, director of de Gaulle's private office, it contained technical advisers like the Gaullist loyalists Olivier Guichard, Jacques Foccart and Pierre Lefranc, and senior civil servants responsible for specific policy areas. J. M. Boegner was in charge of diplomatic affairs, A. de Lattre supervised financial and economic questions, Pierre Lelong education and science, and Bernard Tricot juridical matters, devoting most of his time to Algeria. If one adds to these the general secretaryship for African and Madagascan affairs given first to Raymond Janot and then to Jacques Foccart, and the chief of the president's military staff, a clear picture begins to emerge of the contours of the 'reserved domain'. Others involved included experts who were occasionally summoned, the committees and the (more or less official) special representative. The task of this super private office was to prepare dossiers,



supply information to the head of state and follow up decisions. It was not, in principle, supposed to trespass on ministerial responsibilities. But in reality a group that was in regular contact with the principal centre of decision-taking possessed such power that, for all de Gaulle's desire not to create a parallel structure, it inevitably superseded the relevant ministry once a problem fell within the scope of the 'reserved domain'. Chaban-Delmas implicitly recognised this fact in his analysis of the distinction between the 'reserved' and the 'open' domains. 'In the former the head of state decides, in the latter he chooses. In the former the government implements policy, in the latter it makes it.'

The question thus arises of whether the government actually performed its constitutional function of 'determining and carrying out the policy of the nation'.

#### *A government under surveillance*

'Of course there exists a government which "determines the policy of the nation". But everyone knows – and expects – that it exists by my choice and can only act with my support.' Nothing could be clearer than the words that de Gaulle wrote in his memoirs (I, p. 342). So long as the National Assembly agreed to relinquish its powers and to maintain its confidence in the government, the latter clearly derived its existence from the president. Thus the appointment of prime minister, which the constitution reserved – as in the Third and Fourth Republics – for the head of state, completely changed its significance. In de Gaulle's judgement it was no longer a question of choosing the person most likely to obtain a majority in the National Assembly (which would indicate the parliamentary nature of the regime), but of finding the most suitable figure to implement the policy decided on by the Elysée. Again de Gaulle was unambiguous. 'Given the prime minister's importance and range of functions, he must inevitably be my man. And so he is. He is chosen by me and entrusted with office for a long period, he collaborates with me constantly and closely' (*ibid.*, pp. 346–7). In choosing Michel Debré as prime minister, a long-standing loyalist, de Gaulle effectively appointed a chief of staff capable of putting into effect and supervising the initiatives of the head of state, and of dealing with secondary questions that did not need to be resolved at presidential level. The subordinate role of the prime minister was highlighted by the metaphor which de Gaulle employed in his *Memoirs of Hope*. 'Just as on a ship the ageless wisdom of the sailor ensures that the Commander has an assistant beside him, so in our new Republic the Executive comprises a president, who deals with the essentials, and a prime minister whose task is the contingent' (*ibid.*, p. 347). Amongst the contingencies with which Michel Debré had to deal was the implementation of an Algerian policy which



offended the deepest convictions of his Jacobin patriotism and made the three years of his premiership one long calvary. Yet Debré showed the wisdom of de Gaulle's choice of January 1959 by silencing a conscience agonised by the abandonment of French Algeria in the name of his Gaullist fidelity. It was thus evident that the government's policy was determined less by a team organised around the prime minister than by the wishes of the head of state. Very rarely did meetings of the council of ministers become the occasion for genuine debates. At best the ministers were invited to give their opinions before the president decided. Nothing looked less like the exercise of collective responsibility than these council meetings where each minister appeared to be engaged in a dialogue with de Gaulle over departmental business rather than in any round-table deliberation. The president, moreover, hired and fired ministers at his discretion since the constitutional provision of prime-ministerial nomination was a mere formality. Thus Antoine Pinay was brusquely removed from the government in January 1960 for reasons that owed less to his disagreement with the Minister of Trade and Industry, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, than to his publicly indicated hesitations over de Gaulle's foreign policy options. His attitude – understandable in a regime where policies emerged out of collective decision-taking – was wholly unacceptable to de Gaulle who felt that a minister of finance should not stray outside his departmental brief. As Pinay's successor de Gaulle appointed the extremely reluctant Wilfrid Baumgartner, governor of the Bank of France, who was ordered by the head of state to fill a post for which he had absolutely no enthusiasm. In February 1960, after the week of the barricades, de Gaulle decided to dismiss the integrationist ministers Soustelle and Cornut-Gentile and to downgrade Pierre Guillaumat, who gave up his portfolio as Minister for the Armed Forces to Pierre Messmer and took on the politically less important position of minister delegate to the prime minister.

Thus the government ceased to be the source of policy, so far as the principal areas were concerned. Its principal role – and one that de Gaulle in no sense challenged – was that of policy executant. 'The conduct of business was entirely in the hands of the ministers and I never went over their heads in giving orders to the civil service' (*ibid.*, p. 346). Though subordinate to the head of state, the government nevertheless benefited from being to a certain degree the representative of the unequalled authority which de Gaulle enjoyed. And in this respect it profited too from the spectacular decline in the influence of a hitherto all-powerful parliament.

### *The decline of parliament*

The republican tradition of the Third and Fourth Republics made parliament the corner-stone of public power. Even in the Fifth Republic it kept



many of its formal prerogatives once the constitution-makers had ensured that the essence of parliamentarism – government responsibility to the National Assembly – was preserved. Yet it was obvious that the president of the Republic regarded this feature of the constitution as a relic of an earlier system with little relevance to the values of the new institutional order. 'There is, of course, a parliament and one of its two chambers is entitled to censure governments. But neither the French people nor myself regarded this as a limitation on my own responsibilities, particularly since I had the constitutional authority to dissolve, when appropriate, a hostile chamber, to appeal to the country over the head of parliament by referendum, and in time of national emergency, to take whatever measures I felt necessary (*ibid.*, pp. 342–3).

Assured as he was of the support of a public opinion that expected him to resolve the Algerian crisis, and knowing that the parties' inability to do so rendered them impotent, de Gaulle went out of his way to show his lack of regard for parliament. He did so initially by using his position as guardian – and also author – of the constitution to interpret its meaning. Thus in March 1960 a majority of deputies responded to the insistent demands of the farmers' organisations (who were suffering from a crisis of modernisation) by calling for a special session of parliament to discuss the problems of agriculture. In so doing they referred to article 29 of the constitution which states that 'parliament meets in extraordinary session ... at the request of a majority of members of the National Assembly'. De Gaulle responded to this request, passed to him by the president of the National Assembly, with a refusal based on article 30 which specified that 'extraordinary sessions are opened and closed by a decree of the president of the Republic'. Nobody had imagined that article 30 could be used against article 29. De Gaulle considered that to summon parliament under the pressure of interest groups went against the spirit of the institutions; his action also highlighted the subordinate position of an Assembly that was unable to decide when it should meet.

In second place, the crisis events of Algeria led de Gaulle to govern by special powers, which effectively excluded parliament and demonstrated the unsuitability of its procedures for effective action. In February 1960, after the barricades week, the vote of special powers enabled the government to legislate by ordinances signed by the president of the Republic, thereby strengthening even further his control of the institutions. In April 1961, faced with the generals' putsch in Algiers, the president invoked article 16 of the constitution and exercised the powers which the clause gave him until 30 September 1961 so as to ensure order and to give himself the necessary resources to gain control of the situation on the mainland as well as in Algeria. (This included the creation of special courts like the High Military Tribunal and the Military Tribunal to judge the rebel officers.)



Yet even more damaging for parliament than its subordination to the executive and its exclusion from the Algerian crisis was the institutional culture of the new regime which, because of Algeria, multiplied the use of the procedures of direct democracy. Parliament ceased to be the forum in which national policy was determined, and the parliamentarians found themselves marginalised by the direct dialogue which de Gaulle held with the population. This dialogue took three forms. In the first place there were the numerous public declarations that de Gaulle made on radio and television or during the carefully orchestrated press conferences which enabled him to spell out his policy to the country. The analysis of his words became, as the account of the Algerian crisis has shown, the principal activity of political commentary during the whole period 1958–69. De Gaulle's visits to the departments formed the second element in this 'government by words', and became the occasion for the 'walkabouts' in which the president established that 'direct link' with the French people that he regarded as an indispensable way of going above the heads of the 'intermediary groups'. 'I wanted to communicate visually and aurally with the people itself and not just with its representatives. It was vital that the French should see and hear me – and that I should see and hear them' (*ibid.*, p. 363).

The principal mechanism of this direct democracy was the referendum which became a central element of Gaullist institutional thinking. The referenda were to be, at one and the same time, decisions made by the French on basic political questions (which frequently went beyond the organisation of public powers prescribed by the constitution) and periodic reaffirmations of the legitimacy of a political authority based on universal suffrage. And this was the reason why the opposition denounced as plebiscites the referenda which from 1958 to 1969 punctuated the history of de Gaulle's Republic.

Thus a whole series of institutional practices contributed to the loss of influence suffered by a hitherto omnipotent parliament. The consequence was a reduction in the power of the political parties for which parliament was the natural forum. The resultant resentment which both parties and parliament felt was made even keener by the fact that the letter of the constitution affirmed the parliamentary nature of the regime. Yet it seemed unthinkable to charge de Gaulle with violating his constitution so long as the Algerian crisis made it vital to give him a free hand. The result was that between 1958 and 1962 there developed a mass of veiled resentment that would explode into the open as soon as the Algerian war was over. It became ever clearer as the months passed that a trial of strength was brewing between de Gaulle and the political parties. For together with the growing presidentialisation of the regime caused by the Algerian war, went a weakening of the support which de Gaulle had enjoyed in 1958. By 1962



most of France's political parties moved into opposition against what they regarded as the personal power of the head of state.

*Spring 1962: the parties against the regime*

Four years after de Gaulle's return to power the quasi-unanimity which had greeted his arrival was no more than a memory. As the true character of the regime revealed itself in its daily practice, so the political situation became clearer and de Gaulle's support declined.

The UNR was the only political party to give unconditional support to the president. That, of course, was the reason for its existence. If the Gaullist deputies had shown a certain desire for political independence under the leadership of Albin Chalandon (Roger Frey's successor as secretary general between February and December 1959), they soon abandoned any dreams of autonomy and yielded to Michel Debré's determination to make the UNR a transmission belt for de Gaulle's decisions in parliament and in the country. Having undergone successive purges of its pro-French Algeria activists – Léon Delbecque, Pascal Arrighi, Jacques Soustelle and others – in autumn 1959 (after the self-determination speech), in spring 1960 (after the barricades week) and then in December of the same year just before the referendum on self-determination, it was by now the instrument of de Gaulle's power. The irony was that de Gaulle, who intended to remain 'above parties', claimed to have nothing to do with it yet entrusted his prime minister with the role of party chief of staff. Debré was assisted by the UNR secretary general (Jacques Richard and then Jacques Baumel) whose responsibilities were technical rather than political.

The UNR refused, moreover, to adopt an ideological position and rejected the Left–Right classification, seeing itself as a modern managerial party appealing to the emerging dynamic sections of the population: managers, doctors, technicians, engineers. Described by Michel Debré at its Strasbourg Conference in 1961 as the 'secular instrument of Gaullism', it was a centralised party in which authority came from the summit and whose function was to explain to the country the initiatives which de Gaulle took and his government executed. The UNR dominated, though it did not monopolise, political Gaullism. The small group of 'left-wing Gaullists' contained strong personalities like René Capitant, Louis Vallon, Léo Hamon and Gilbert Grandval and in April created the Union démocratique du travail (UDT) which never succeeded in attracting much popular support.

If unlimited governmentalism was the appointed task of the Gaullist family, the Communist Party for its part took on the role of irreconcilable adversary. It is true that this analysis needs to be modified in at least two



ways. The Communist Party was relatively favourable to the government's foreign policy orientations since they represented a certain distancing of the regime from Washington and a clear desire for a *rapprochement* with the communist states (see chapter 7). And even though the party criticised the delays and the style of de Gaulle's Algerian policy, it could not but welcome the outcome and thus voted 'yes' in the referendum of April 1962. With the exception of these two areas, however, the party engaged in a blunt condemnation of the political system of the Fifth Republic in which it discerned an 'absolutist presidential regime' that reflected the 'power of the big monopolies'. Both of these relied on the 'military bureaucracy' and the system was one, according to Thorez's report to the Fifteenth Congress of the PCF, that opened the way to Fascism (*L'Humanité*, 25 June 1959). In 1961 the party expelled from its ranks Marcel Servin, Laurent Casanova and sections of the leadership of the Mouvement de la Paix, and of the union of communist students, a heterogeneous group of supporters of intra-party modernisation which contained many who followed Servin and Casanova in advocating a less simplistic analysis of Gaullism. The result was that the party of Maurice Thorez remained at the heart of intransigent opposition to the regime.

Another element of absolutist opposition was provided by the Parti socialiste unifié (PSU), a new party formed in April 1960 by intellectuals and activists from the extreme left. Its origins lay with the dissidents of the SFIO who in 1958 had created the Parti socialiste autonome, and whose ranks were swelled by Pierre Mendès France and his supporters, Communist Party dissidents grouped around Jean Poperon and the *Tribune du communisme* journal, left-wing Catholics from the Jeune République and the Mouvement de libération populaire, and the secularist left-wingers who ran the weekly *France-Observateur* under Claude Bourdet and Gilles Martinet. The principal unifying element of this organisation of widely differing political temperaments was the rejection of the Gaullist regime and the search for a modern socialism capable of offering a new type of solution. But the PSU rejected the membership request made by François Mitterrand and his friends. At the time Mitterrand was extremely isolated and in October 1959 fell victim to a trap organised by the extreme right. The trap, which involved a fake assassination attempt in the gardens of the Observatory, was used against him by the regime. Mitterrand fell back on an organisation formed out of the remnants of the left-wing section of the UDSR, the phantom Ligue pour le combat républicain, whose essence was once again a profound anti-Gaullism. But this violently anti-Gaullist Left, for all the brilliance of its leaders, had very few members.

Gradually, however, the mainstream forces of traditional republicanism which had supported de Gaulle in 1958, moved into opposition on account of his political style. The refusal of the Socialist Party to join the Debré



government in January 1959 did not signify a move to open opposition. Despite the pressures of his left wing (led by Albert Gazier and Gaston Defferre), Guy Mollet succeeded in maintaining a flexible line which allowed the party to support the government's Algerian strategy while criticising its military policy and the bulk of its domestic decisions. Amongst these were its budgetary and educational policies (the Debré law of December 1959 enabling private schools to sign contracts with the state which in some cases permitted the financing by the State of teachers' salaries and running costs), and above all de Gaulle's constitutional practice. The latter seemed to Guy Mollet – one of the authors of the constitution – to be a betrayal of the pledges made in 1958. This opposition remained prudent and the SFIO took care that it should not, so long as the Algerian war continued, bring about the overthrow of the government. Yet it was clear enough that only the Algerian crisis was keeping the SFIO within the bounds of moderation.

Badly shaken by the events of 1958, which left it with only thirteen deputies, the Radical Party had come to resemble a political archaism. Though at first the party supported the new regime despite the energetic opposition of Jean Baylet, all-powerful director of the *Dépêche du Midi*, who died in a car crash in 1959, it soon increased its distance. The resignation in May 1959 of Jean Berthoin deprived it of any presence in government, the Debré law offended its secularist convictions and, above all, de Gaulle's refusal to summon a special session of parliament against the wishes of a majority of deputies led it to claim that 'a formal requirement of the constitution has been cast aside by the very authorities whose task it is to ensure its application'. Such a denial of the traditions of republicanism, by enabling a government 'to evade the control of the representatives of the Nation', pushed the Radical Party into open opposition to the regime.

The MRP's attitude towards the new political order was even more uneasy than was that of the SFIO. Within the MRP there existed a long-standing tradition of fidelity to de Gaulle which dated back to the Resistance – Maurice Schumann, one of its leaders, had been the spokesman of the Free French. Moreover, the party was deeply convinced of the need for the sort of institutional reform that de Gaulle had introduced, and the departure from its ranks of those who, like Georges Bidault, supported the cause of French Algeria fortified its role as firm supporter of de Gaulle's Algerian policy. Yet as a committed supporter of parliamentary democracy, the MRP shared the socialists' and radicals' outrage at de Gaulle's conception of the presidency, and at his disdain for parliament. Above all it could not but be aware of de Gaulle's hostility to the European supranationalism that was part of its belief system. It is true that de Gaulle went along with the establishment of the Common Market; but the initiatives he took from 1960 onwards concerning the political organi-



sation of Europe – the Fouchet Plan – sought to consolidate rather than to transcend nation states (see chapter 7). But so long as the Algerian question remained primordial, the MRP, like the socialists, was constrained to conceal its unease.

The other major political force was the CNIP, which had done extremely well from its decision to rally to Gaullism. In 1958 it appeared to be the latter's privileged partner in the majority, a role underlined by Antoine Pinay's position as Minister of Finance. Pinay left the government in 1960 and withdrew into a disapproving silence that led many to regard him as a possible replacement should de Gaulle depart. In fact, however, the CNIP (which was always a gathering of political personalities rather than a properly structured party) underwent a major internal crisis from 1960 onwards. The youthful Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, secretary of state for the Budget and the most glitteringly brilliant member of this constellation of notables, became the focus of a group of 'Gaullist' independents who supported the general's policy. But Roger Duchet, the general secretary of the CNIP, was a French Algeria diehard and organised what was undoubtedly a majority faction against de Gaulle's Algerian policy. Though political prudence stopped the CNIP from going into open opposition, it declined to tell its supporters how to vote in the two referenda of January 1961 and April 1962. It also refused to condemn the generals' putsch and continued to demand 'that Algeria should stay within the French Republic'. It should also be noted that a group of moderates, of whom Paul Reynaud was the symbol, supported de Gaulle's Algerian policy but soon became critical of his institutional style out of loyalty to parliamentarism.

Leaving aside the unconditional pro-system loyalty of the UNR on the one hand, and the no less determined opposition of the Communist Party and the irreconcilable Left on the other, we can see that only the barrier of the Algerian war prevented the bulk of the traditional political parties from going into opposition. The decisive settling of accounts between the parties and the new political order had been at best adjourned; and it was clear that once peace broke out in Algeria, a trial of strength would be inevitable. Rather than allow the parties to gather their resources for the impending battle, de Gaulle himself went on the offensive immediately after the Evian agreement had been ratified by the referendum of April 1962.

### *De Gaulle goes on the attack: the Pompidou government*

It was so obvious that once the Algerian war was over the delayed struggle between de Gaulle and the parties would come into the open that the prime minister suggested that the former should strike the first blow. Debré



proposed that, in the wake of the triumphal referendum of April 1962, de Gaulle should dissolve the National Assembly and then, with the support of a new majority, put into operation the parliamentarism which in his opinion (and Debré had been the principal author of the 1958 constitution) was its institutional essence. De Gaulle's analysis was different. He rejected the idea of an election which, coming soon after the referendum, would produce political confusion since all the parties would seek to claim credit for the peace. De Gaulle opted instead for clarification by compulsion – the political groupings would be forced to come out clearly for or against ideas that he regarded as fundamental for France's future and that he believed the parties rejected. This clarification by challenge had three successive stages: a change of prime minister; the rejection of a supranational Europe; and the reform of the method for electing the president of the Republic.

The departure of Michel Debré from the premiership was the first move. Debré had lived the Algerian drama as a personal trauma and had frequently offered his resignation before accepting, out of loyalty to de Gaulle, the role of executant of a solution which grieved him deeply. With peace assured, de Gaulle decided that his task was over and that it was necessary to replace a head of government who was worn out by three years' labour in the most difficult – and dangerous – circumstances. It may also be true that another element in his decision was the disagreement between the two men over the proper functioning of institutions in normal times since de Gaulle was obviously less 'parliamentarist' than his prime minister. Whatever the truth of this, the departure of a prime minister who had never lost the support of the National Assembly was regarded by both parliament and parties as a direct challenge. For all that de Gaulle respected the constitutional proprieties of article 8 in 'accepting the resignation' that his prime minister offered, no one doubted that the initiative came from the head of state whose position as the linchpin of the political structure was thereby confirmed. It was a way of making clear something that the constitution had not spelled out; namely that the prime minister was effectively the creation of the president and that his sole task was to put into operation the policy upon which the president of the Republic had determined.

To a departure which parliament could not but regard as a fresh assault on the traditions of republicanism, de Gaulle added a second challenge in appointing as successor to Michel Debré – a former senator and experienced veteran of parliamentary battles – the virtually unknown Georges Pompidou. Pompidou was neither a politician nor a parliamentarian but a literary academic who had been a member of de Gaulle's staff from 1944 to 1946, had run the private office of the RPF period until 1954, and had then pursued a career in Rothschild's bank. From June to December 1958, when



de Gaulle was prime minister, he again ran his office. In 1959 he was appointed a member of the Constitutional Council, and was also entrusted by the head of state with various secret missions (notably in regard to the Algerian war). Yet having turned down the Finance Ministry in summer 1961, he looked the following spring much more like a personal assistant to de Gaulle than a political figure. In his *Memoirs of Hope*, de Gaulle explained why he had chosen him. 'Though his culture and his intelligence ensured that no goals were too exalted for him to comprehend, his temperament led him naturally to concentrate on the practical side of things. He admired the brilliant action, the daring venture, the bold decision. But his natural inclination was to discretion and the prudent *démarche*, where he always excelled in grasping the elements and finding a solution' (II, p. 79). What de Gaulle traced here is the portrait of the ideal number two, the second in command capable of the skilful and prudent implementation of the grand designs thought up by the president of the Republic. To the political world, however, his appointment was clear evidence that de Gaulle intended to take direct control of the nation's affairs and to exercise power through a prime minister who was there precisely because he was a personal collaborator without any authority, in his relations with both parliament and country, other than that bestowed on him by the head of state.

It is true that the prime minister attempted to disarm the growling hostility of the politicians. The government which he formed on 25 April contained more parliamentarians than its predecessor, even though plenty of non-parliamentarians continued to hold important positions, with André Malraux as Minister of State for Cultural Affairs, Louis Joxe as Minister of State for Algerian Affairs, Maurice Couve de Murville as Minister for Foreign Affairs, Pierre Messmer as Minister for the Armed Forces, and Pierre Sudreau as Minister for National Education. But the bulk of the ministerial team came from the groups of the parliamentary majority – the UNR, the MRP (with five ministers headed by Pierre Pflimlin and Maurice Schumann) and the independents. Pompidou agreed, moreover, to set out his programme to the National Assembly and, as Debré had done before him, to seek its approval. In his National Assembly debut he spelled out the Gaullist doctrine on governmental legitimacy. 'Appointed by the head of state – and thus dependent on him – the government remains accountable to the National Assembly.' The response of the deputies was one of reserve rather than enthusiasm. If 259 voted confidence in the government, 119 abstained and 128 voted against. Alongside the outright opposition of Right and Left, three-quarters of the independents and half the MRP refused to back the Gaullist reading of institutional power. The head of state's majority was henceforth narrow; his policy choices would make it disappear altogether.



*De Gaulle's challenges: Algeria and Europe*

The first weeks of the Pompidou government coincided with the period of the last acts of the Algerian drama between the mainland referendum of April and the Algerian referendum in July. The supporters of French Algeria were kept in a state of simmering exasperation by the return to France in conditions of near-total disorganisation of 700,000 Europeans, the OAS outrages, the death sentence passed on Jouhaud on 13 April and Salan's condemnation to life imprisonment on 23 May. (In the latter case de Gaulle was enraged by the clemency of the verdict and replaced the High Military Tribunal with the Military Court of Justice). On 6 June, 113 deputies, including half the independents, supported the censure motion against the government introduced by the Algerian deputies in protest against the 'genocide' inflicted on those sections of the population who had remained loyal to France.

The opposition de Gaulle faced in this sphere was the inevitable consequence of his policy decisions over Algeria. But the narrow majority on which his government depended was further shaken by his press conference of 15 May in which he clarified the principles of his European policy. Blithely disregarding the supranational convictions of his MRP he declared in answer to a question that 'Europe is only conceivable as a Europe of states' in which national sovereignty remains supreme. He savaged the concept of supranationality and mercilessly derided those who believed that it would be possible to communicate 'in some sort of integrated esperanto or volapuk'. Despite his subsequent efforts to avoid the outcome, the five MRP ministers (Pierre Pflimlin, Maurice Schumann, Robert Buron, Joseph Fontanet and Paul Bacon) resigned the same night. The parliamentary group of independents put pressure on its ministers for them to do the same. But Louis Jacquinot (Minister of State for Overseas Departments and Territories), Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs) and Jean de Broglie (Secretary of State for the Civil Service) refused to resign. Excluded from the parliamentary group together with Raymond Marcellin, who replaced Joseph Fontanet at Public Health, they forthwith established the bases of a new organisation of Gaullist independents which took the name of 'independent republicans'. Although the MRP denied that it wished to move into open opposition, its departure virtually deprived the Pompidou government of its majority. Moreover, the cause of European supranationalism which de Gaulle had denounced was henceforth to be the cement of an opposition to Gaullist foreign policy that brought together, around such dedicated supporters of European construction as Jean Monnet and Pierre Uri, socialists, radicals, MRP and independents, and trade union organisations like the CFTC and Force ouvrière. Representatives of these organisations



met at Pierre Uri's house on 16 January 1962 at the 'Alma dinner'. Far from trying to pacify an opposition that was on the way to becoming a majority, de Gaulle decided to force it to respond to what it regarded as the ultimate provocation – a constitutional amendment that would further strengthen the authority of the president of the Republic.

*De Gaulle's third challenge: the election of the president by universal suffrage*

Hardly had the Pompidou government been formed in spring 1962 than rumours resurfaced of an impending constitutional revision. They originated in de Gaulle's 8 June television broadcast in which he reaffirmed his constitutional position and added a sibylline phrase that gave rise to countless analyses. 'Between the People and Him who is entrusted with its government there must be, in the modern world of our Republic, a direct bond. When the time is right we will need to ensure through universal suffrage that in future the Republic may remain strong, organised and permanent – even though its leaders are mortal' (*Discours et messages*, III, pp. 422–3).

Rumours, forecasts and questions multiplied as to the nature of the proposed revision and the possibility of a vice-presidency. But no further confirmation was vouchsafed.

It was the attempt on de Gaulle's life on 22 August 1962 that brought matters to a climax. On that day the car in which de Gaulle was travelling was caught in a hail of bullets fired by OAS activists; the head of state, with his wife and son-in-law, Colonel de Boisseu, escaped death by a miracle. A tremendous shockwave ran through the country. De Gaulle decided for his part that the moment had come to take action, to 'sort things out' as he wrote in *Memoirs of Hope*, and to make the decision he now took the centrepiece of his struggle against the political parties' and parliament's pretensions to institutional pre-eminence. At a council of ministers meeting held on 12 September 1962 it was decided, in accordance with article 11 of the constitution, to hold a national referendum on the direct election of the president of the Republic. (Article 11 states that 'the president of the Republic may, on the proposition of the government, when parliament is sitting, or on the joint proposition of both Chambers ... submit to a referendum any bill on the organisation of public powers'.)

De Gaulle's decision provoked near universal outrage among both politicians and jurists. With the exception of the UNR, which had accepted the idea of reform at its 1961 conference, disapproval of both principle and procedure was virtually absolute. As far as the former was concerned, de Gaulle had resolved in favour of presidentialism the question mark which had hung over the institutional nature of the regime ever since 1958. For it was obvious that a head of state chosen by universal suffrage would



henceforth enjoy an authority that placed him far above all other authorities. The preponderance of the head of state within the institutional structure would thus be unchallengeable. His election by universal suffrage went right against the political culture of the majority of the parliamentarians of the time who were imbued with a 'republican tradition' that postulated the pre-eminence of a parliament composed of the representatives of the 'sovereign people'. Once a president came personally to embody through election the totality of popular sovereignty, he would be able to view the representative legitimacy of the deputies as secondary, since each of them could lay claim to only one four-hundreth of that sovereignty. And immediately the shadows of the past rose up: the election by universal suffrage of Louis-Napoléon in December 1848, the *coup d'état* of 2 December 1851, plebiscitary Caesarism. It was thus to defend traditional republicanism, for which Republic and parliamentary supremacy were synonymous, that the opponents of the reform joined battle.

At the Vichy Congress of the Radical Party in September 1962, Gaston Monnerville, the president of the Senate, spoke of a violation of the constitution and accused the prime minister of an illegal abuse of power, something for which de Gaulle never forgave him. Monnerville was joined by representatives of all the political parties, with the exception of the UNR, in a campaign against what they regarded as de Gaulle's bid for 'personal power'. The Communist Party immediately announced its intention to campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum. Elsewhere, socialists, radicals, MRP and independents decided to join forces in a 'cartel of noes'. Its goal was to defend the 'principles of republicanism', and its leader was the veteran moderate deputy Paul Reynaud. The long-standing threat had now materialised – de Gaulle was to face a coalition of all the political parties, except his own.

Criticism of the procedure focused on the denial of parliament's rights. On this point the jurists came to the aid of the parliamentarians. Most of the constitutional specialists – academics like Maurice Duverger and Georges Vedel, confirmed Gaullists like Léon Noël, president of the Constitutional Council, Professor René Cassin, vice-president of the Council of State, Alexander Parodi and virtually all the members of the Council of State – believed that the method chosen was unconstitutional. They argued that revision of the constitution required the use of article 89 which stipulated that 'a governmental or parliamentary proposal of constitutional revision must be voted in identical form by both Assemblies. It enters into application once it has been approved by referendum.' They also asserted that article 11, which de Gaulle proposed to use, applied solely to ordinary, and not to constitutional, laws. These arguments, though unanswerable in themselves, were not likely to weaken de Gaulle's determination to press ahead. The lapidary phrase that he employed in his



*Memoirs of Hope* to resolve the issue was directed at the parties, but applied equally to the jurists, and revealed just how exasperated he was by all this constitutional analysis. 'I am bound to say that the obstinacy with which the parties interpreted the constitution, refusing the People a right which belonged to them, struck me as all the more arbitrary in that I myself was the principal theoretician of the constitution and that it was a real impertinence to presume to challenge me on its meaning' (II, p. 29).

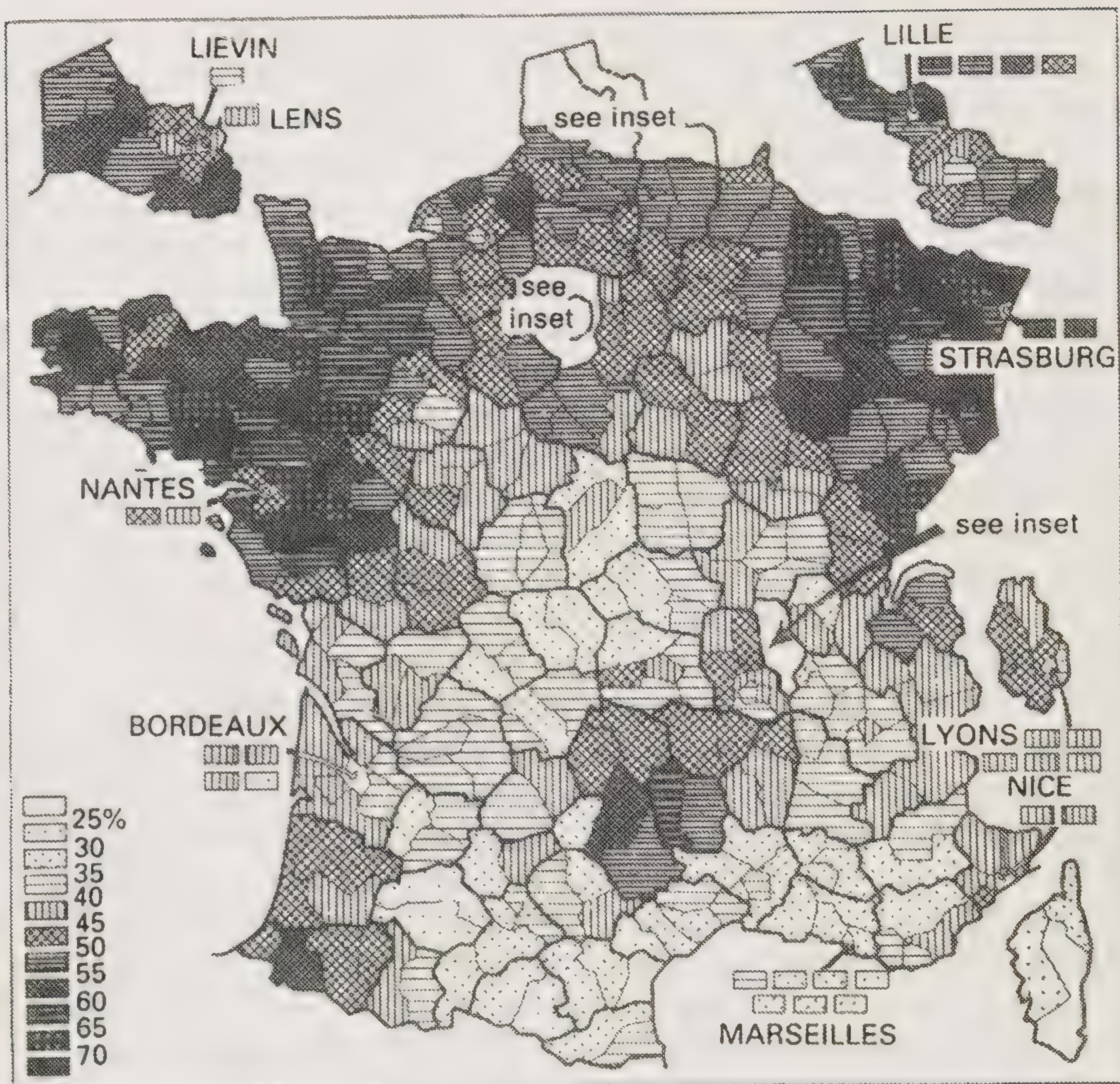
Yet in choosing to use article 11 rather than article 89, and to appeal over the heads of the parliamentarians by a direct dialogue with the electorate, de Gaulle was opposing two forms of democracy – direct and parliamentary. Thus both the procedure and the principle of the referendum of 28 October 1962 were interpreted as a declaration of war by de Gaulle on the political parties and on parliament, the institution which was the forum for their existence. The parties' reply was to use the one institutional weapon they did possess – the censure motion.

Parliament reassembled on 2 October 1962 and was treated to a message from General de Gaulle informing it of the referendum that was to take place at the end of the month. The triumphal re-election of the Senate president Gaston Monnerville was a clear demonstration of hostility to the head of state. In the National Assembly, representatives of all the parties, except the UNR, followed Paul Reynaud in signing a censure motion accusing the president of the Republic of 'violating the constitution of which he is the guardian', and demanding the censure of the government since it was only on its proposal that the president could act. Reynaud himself delivered the *coup de grâce* in a ringing declaration of parliamentary faith. 'For us republicans, France exists here and nowhere else ... The representatives of the people assembled together constitute the Nation and there can be no more solemn declaration of the People's will than the vote which they take after public deliberation.'

On 5 October the censure motion which overthrew the Pompidou government was voted in by 280 votes (the necessary majority was 241). De Gaulle responded immediately by keeping the government in office, dissolving the National Assembly and decreeing that legislative elections would take place, after the referendum, on 18 and 25 November 1962.

The battle thus engaged between de Gaulle and the political parties was not unlike the events of 16 May 1877. In both cases two irreconcilable principles clashed: did political supremacy reside with the president or with parliament? Should the regime be parliamentary or semi-presidential? (Only a handful of constitutionalists argued for an American-type presidential system with the separation of powers.) But if the crisis of autumn 1962 recalled 16 May 1877, the outcome was a 16 May turned on its head – for the president won hands down.





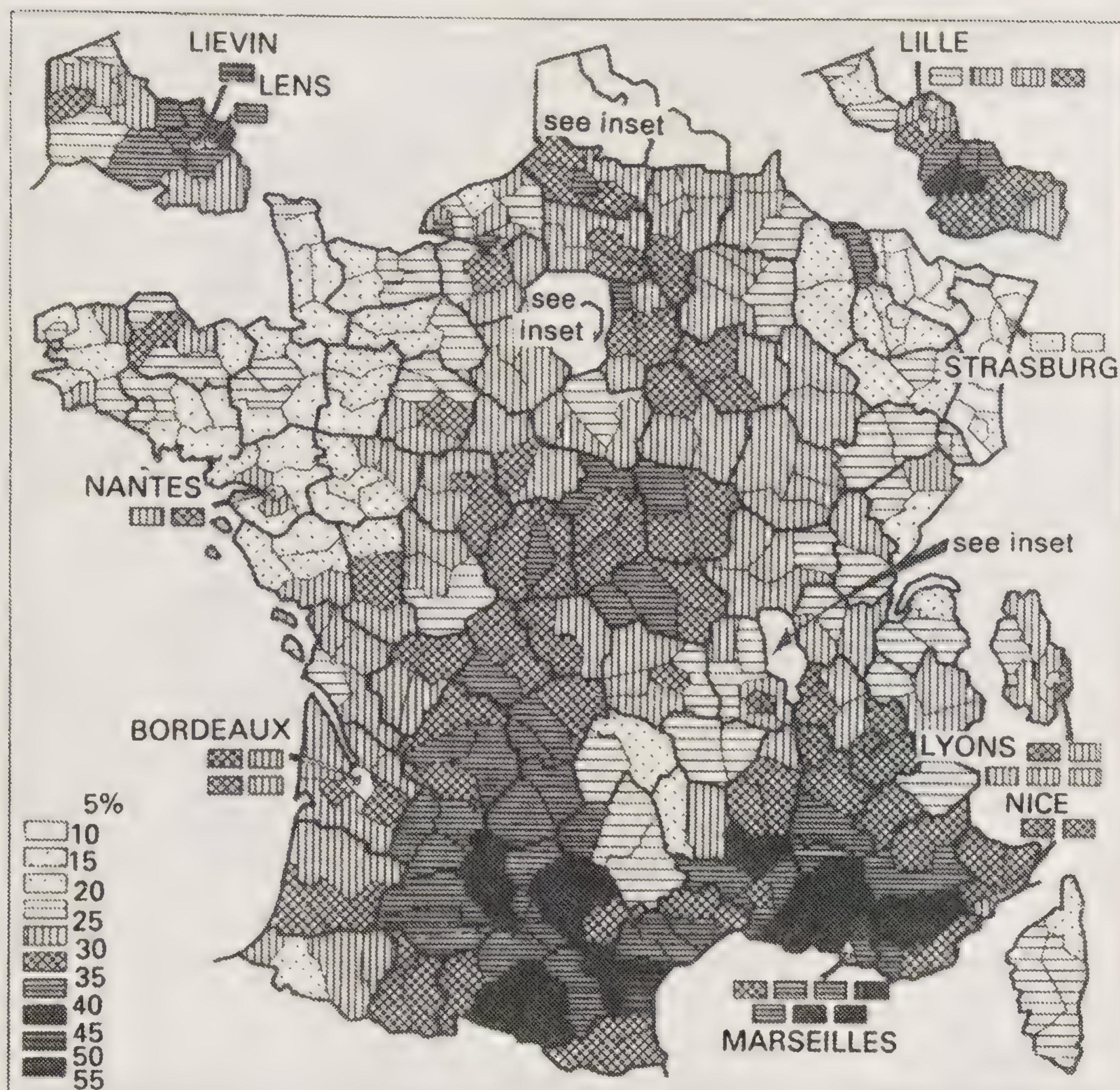
Map 3 Results of 28 October 1962 referendum: 'Yes' votes  
Percentage of electorate at 18 November 1962

Source: *Le Référendum d'octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, Presses de la FNSP, 1965, p. 297

*The 28 October referendum, and the victory of the presidential reading of the constitution*

In the struggle that opposed de Gaulle and the traditional parties, the advantage looked to reside with the latter. For the president had to face the opposition not simply of all the parties except the UNR, but also of the professional bodies, the trade unions and the jurists. The supporters of a 'no' vote could feel also that they had with them the political culture of republicanism which used memories of 16 May to demonstrate the validity of the equation Republic = parliamentarism. Yet this political culture had actually been on the defensive ever since the inter-war period, and had fallen into even greater discredit in the Fourth Republic with the growing



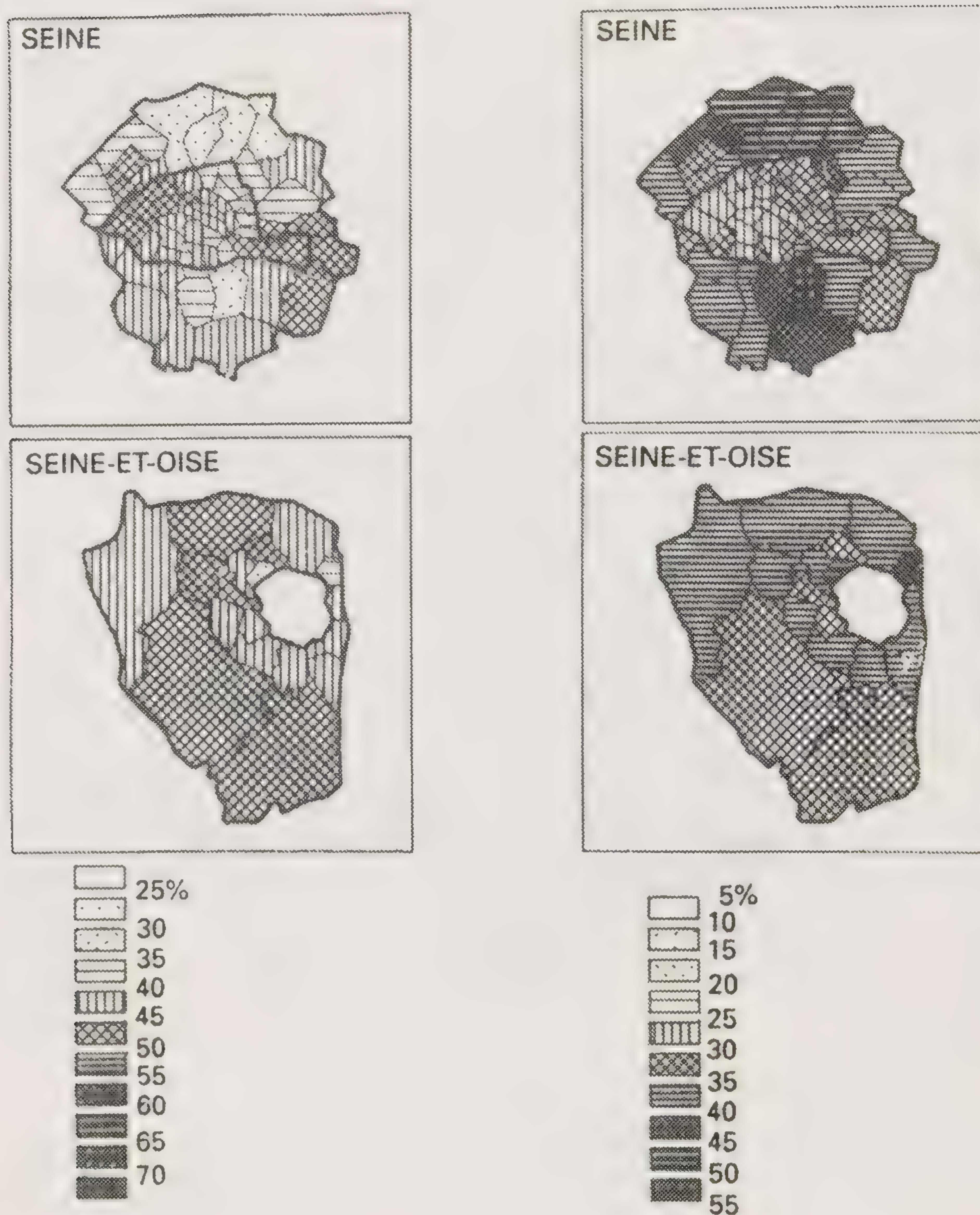


Map 4 Results of 28 October 1962 referendum: 'No' votes  
Percentage of electorate at 18 November 1962

Source: *Le Référendum d'octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, Presses de la FNSP, 1965, p. 295

realisation that its institutional form was incapable of dealing with the challenges of the modern world. The desire of the French to be governed, which had already shown itself in 1954 with Mendèsism, was beyond any question de Gaulle's major asset, together with the second advantage that he was offering the electorate the right to choose the head of state itself instead of leaving it to the parliamentarians. This was naturally enough the theme that de Gaulle hammered home in the various speeches that he made during the campaign. He tied his own continuation in power to the result of the referendum and raised the spectre of a return to the weaknesses and dangers of the past. 'If you reject my proposal and follow the advice of the old parties who want to restore their disastrous regime and of all the





Map 5 Results of 28 October 1962 referendum, Paris region  
 'Yes' votes  
 'No' votes

Percentage of electorate at 18 November 1962

Source: *Le Référendum d'octobre et les élections de novembre 1962*, Presses de la FNSP, 1965, pp. 294 and 296

subversives who seek an outlet for their sedition; or if the majority you grant me is feeble, mediocre and indecisive, then it goes without saying that my task will be immediately – and irrevocably – ended' (*Discours et messages*, IV, p. 36).



There can be little doubt that in this clash with the republican tradition upheld by the political parties the survival of the Fifth Republic was at stake. A negative vote would lead to de Gaulle's departure and to the restoration of the parliamentary Republic. Victory for de Gaulle, by contrast, would be the triumph of one man against all the rest, would give popular consecration to his semi-presidential interpretation of the constitution and would signify the end of the old institutional model of parliamentary republicanism.

On the evening of 28 October the nation's verdict was given. De Gaulle obtained his majority, but its relatively modest dimensions revealed the extent of public anxiety. There was in the first place, and despite the importance of the issue, a notable increase in the abstention rate – 22.76 per cent of the eligible electorate did not take part in the vote as against 15 per cent in 1958. It is clear that this increase resulted from a double rejection of the Fifth Republic and of the traditional parties by, for example, the former supporters of French Algeria who could not forgive de Gaulle for his Algerian policy. That said, the 'yes' vote won a clear victory over the opposition since 61.75 per cent of those who voted approved the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage as against 38.25 per cent who did not. Yet here again an apparently clear result needs to be qualified. The 'yes' vote represented less than 50 per cent (46.44) of the electorate and some speculated that de Gaulle would regard this as 'feeble, mediocre and indecisive'. In the second place there was a sharp increase in the 'no' vote, which rose from 20.7 per cent of votes cast in 1958 to 38.25 per cent in 1962. Against this it should be noted that the increase was due to the move into opposition of the MRP, the socialists, the radicals and the independents, and that the fact that opposition to Gaullism rose by only 18 per cent shows how greatly the influence of these four parties had declined. The significance of de Gaulle's victory over the coalition of parties was more qualitative than quantitative. A breakdown of the results shows that the map of the 'yes' vote includes, alongside the traditional Gaullist bastions of the east and west, the big cities and northern France – in other words the economically dynamic regions. The centre of gravity of the 'no' vote was south of the Loire, particularly in the centre and south-west, regions with a strong republican and radical tradition, but much less affected by the economic mutations taking place in a period of growth. Thus de Gaulle's victory could be depicted as that of the new France over the old.

The referendum of 28 October 1962 is without doubt a turning-point in the history of the Fifth Republic and was indeed its second foundation. For a 'republican tradition' founded on a moribund parliamentarism it substituted a new political culture based on the coexistence of the republican regime with a strong executive. In many ways it provided the Fifth



Republic with its true identity after the fudge of the 1958 text which had been a compromise between de Gaulle's belief that the regime should be based on the primacy of the president, and the traditional parties' preference for parliamentarism. Leaving aside the endless debate on whether de Gaulle had desired a directly elected president in 1958 (or even in 1946 at the time of the Bayeux speech), it is obvious that such a system was clearly part of the constitutional logic of the Fifth Republic. In 1962 there was no further room for ambiguity. The 1958 compromise was finished and de Gaulle had vanquished the parties. The emphatic nature of a victory obtained by a massive popular vote rendered it irreversible to the political nation, even if there were some who, like Pierre Mendès France, continued to reject a constitutional modification that they regarded as 'anti-republican'.

The victory of the Gaullist reading of the Fifth Republic sealed the result of the legislative elections arranged for 18 and 25 November. They would be simply the parliamentary consequence of the national choice made on 28 October.

*The elections of November 1962 and the destruction of the traditional parties*

The significance of the vote of 18 and 25 November was clearly spelled out in de Gaulle's speech of 7 November which depicted the contest as one between the new Republic and 'yesterday's parties' which for him no longer represented the nation. Thus the dividing line between the two camps was straightforward. Within the Gaullist ranks, André Malraux created an Association pour la V<sup>e</sup> République whose purpose was to give official backing to the candidates who stood in de Gaulle's name. For the elections the left-wing Gaullists of the UDT amalgamated with the UNR, the two groups setting aside their disagreements once the future of the regime was at issue. The Gaullists did, however, look very isolated, given that their only outside support came from the small group of 'independent republicans' (who did not form a separate organisation until after round one), and from a handful of MRP-ites like Maurice Schumann. In the opposing camp the members of the 'cartel of noes' had drawn up a programme during the referendum campaign and now signed a series of electoral pacts that meant that the SFIO did not put up candidates against the independent leaders Paul Reynaud and Bernard Motte. Guy Mollet went even further in enlarging the coalition. He let it be known on 12 November that if the socialists had to choose on round two between a Gaullist and a communist, they should vote for the latter. And yet this creation by enlargement of an anti-Gaullist bloc to oppose the Gaullist equivalent was more apparent than real. If the radicals lined up behind the socialists, MRP and independents did not conceal their unease at Mollet's initiative



Table 4. *Legislative elections of 18 and 25 November 1962: first round*

		% of electorate	% vote
Electorate	27,535,019	100	
Votes	18,931,733		
Abstentions	8,603,286	31.31	
Spoilt papers	601,747	2.12	
PCF	3,992,431	14.56	21.7
Extreme Left	449,743	1.6	2.4
SFIO	2,319,662	8.4	12.6
Radicals and allies	1,384,498	5	7.5
MRP	1,635,452	5.9	8.9
UNR-UDT	5,847,403	21.34	31.9
Independent Republicans	798,092	2.8	4.4
Moderates	1,742,523	6.3	9.6
Extreme Right	159,682	0.5	0.9

and a split opened up within the 'no' cartel between a Centre-Left which was willing to ally with the communists and a Centre-Right which was not.

The round-one results of 18 November underscored those of the referendum; to the surprise of all the commentators they did not, however, conform to the traditional balance of electoral forces in France. For what happened, despite a very high abstention rate of 31 per cent was a Gaullist landslide. With 32 per cent of votes cast, the Gaullists gained a victory unparalleled in the history of French parliaments where no party had hitherto gained more than 30 per cent of the vote. On the evening of the first round the Gaullists had already elected sixty-one deputies. Among the opposition parties the communists made up a little of the ground they had lost in 1958 by moving from 19 to 21.7 per cent of the vote – but the parties of the cartel of noes were crushed. In this defeat the Centre-Left, which had already been badly mauled in 1958, did somewhat less badly than the Right and the Centre-Right (the radicals held on to the feeble 7.5 per cent of the vote they had won in 1958, and the socialists lost three points). In 1958 the formations of the Right and Centre-Right had benefited from their role as partners of Gaullism. Four years on they had become its opponents and suffered a devastating defeat. The decline of the MRP accelerated as it fell below 9 per cent of the vote (it had won 11 per cent in 1958); the independents, divided as they were into two factions, did no better; and the extreme Right was virtually eliminated from the electoral map. It is plain that the old party system had disintegrated under the hammer blows of Gaullism.

The second round served merely to emphasise the lessons of the first. The overwhelming advance of the UNR led to the disappearance of the cartel of



Table 5. *Legislative elections of November 1962: second round*

	Number of deputies elected
PCF	41
SFIO	66
Democratic rally (radicals and UDSR)	39
Democratic centre (MRP, liberals, opposition independents)	55
UNR	233
Independent Republicans	36

noes since the MRP and the independents refused to go along with the socialist choice of a communist over a Gaullist. Given these circumstances the UNR harvested 42.1 per cent of the second round vote, and its 233 deputies came close to gaining an absolute majority of Assembly seats (the required figure was 242). Once the thirty-six members of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's independent republicans were added, such a majority was easily obtained. The core of the opposition came from the Left. The second-round pacts between communists and socialists enabled the former to win forty-one seats and the latter sixty-six (as against ten and forty-three in the 1958 chamber). Caught between the two big battalions of Gaullism and the Left, the centrists and moderates were badly squeezed. The radicals and Mitterrand's UDSR had thirty-nine deputies (twenty-six of them radical) who formed the Rassemblement démocratique group. The opposition moderates were reduced to fifteen and forced to form a Centre démocratique with the remnants of the MRP and René Pleven's liberals. Just as the Left had been swept aside by Gaullism in 1958, so now the Right too paid the price of its opposition. Thus the 1962 elections marked the collapse of the traditional party system while the emerging alliance systems foreshadowed its reconstruction on new bases. These bases were to lead to a simplification of the political landscape around a small number of extended political families.

On the evening of 25 November, de Gaulle had therefore completed his victory over the political parties and set his regime in concrete. The people had ratified his constitutional ideas; he had an unconditional majority in the National Assembly; and the Algerian albatross had disappeared. The way was now open for him to lead the country in the directions he had chosen. The hour had struck for Gaullism to realise its grand designs.



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## Part 2

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# **Charles de Gaulle and 50 million French people**







## The institutional and political framework

His position assured by the victory of 1962, General de Gaulle was now able to lead France along the road which his imagination had mapped out. The ultimate destination was without any doubt global; for a political visionary of his nature, a nation's grandeur was measured by its role in the world. Yet for France to be worthy of the destiny that de Gaulle dreamed of, the country needed to possess adequate strength and to shake off the weaknesses that had been the curse of the defunct Fourth Republic. Thus the grand designs of Gaullism needed to be underpinned by properly functioning institutions, by an economic growth that would enrich the country and provide it with the wealth it needed, and by the avoidance of any further colonial entanglements that would prevent it from playing its proper role. To put it another way, France had to adapt in every sphere to the world of the twentieth century. When de Gaulle declared in one of his press conferences that 'France has married her century', he articulated one of the major themes of his action (even as he stressed – and doubtless exaggerated – the difference between this attitude and that of the Fourth Republic). The reality was, of course, less straightforward than de Gaulle claimed in his speeches, his press conferences and his memoirs – and needs to be distinguished from the biased version that Gaullist discourse articulated.

This point is further underscored by the fact that alongside de Gaulle there existed fifty million French people who did not in any sense constitute an inert mass to be moulded as he chose. Although de Gaulle's initiatives often had a decisive effect, they still had to take account of the aspirations, the wishes, the acquiescence (and non-acquiescence) of a people whom de Gaulle would have wished to share his vision – but with whom he had to come to terms if his grandiose ideas were to become a living reality. There was often a disappointingly wide gap between dream and reality. Yet there remained the weapon of language, language that could magnify reality and close the gap between it and ambition by giving a heroic gloss to the daily struggle with the various pressures that bear down on states and cannot be mastered by the will, or the actions, of leaders. Thus de Gaulle used



discourse to create his own legend while seeking at the same time to achieve France's adaptation to the realities of the 1960s and to a world in which the country had at last emerged out of a twenty-year crisis. It was in the political sphere that this adaptation was most immediately visible.

### *The presidential Republic*

The outcome of the 1962 crisis had determined once and for all the primacy of the presidency within the institutional framework of the Fifth Republic, a state of affairs that was further entrenched by the change of prime minister. Michel Debré, whose personality combined authority and passion, had always been prepared to take major decisions in those policy areas not reserved for the head of state (as in the decrees on private education or hospital reform), and had chaired meetings of the cabinet council. Such authority as Georges Pompidou, his successor, initially possessed derived from de Gaulle and reverted to him when key decisions were to be taken. At such times Pompidou prepared the groundwork for these decisions carefully and subsequently ensured that they were fully implemented by the administration; but his role in policy formulation was smaller than Debré's had been. He also gave up the practice of holding cabinet council meetings at the Hôtel Matignon. Between 1958 and 1962 a dual power had existed in which overall policy formulation and the direct control of key policy areas of the reserved domain took place at the Elysée while the role of preparation and execution of the latter, together with all other sectors of national policy, was located in the Hôtel Matignon. Henceforth a single power centre existed at the Elysée, though policy emerged out of the continuous dialogue between president and prime minister. The evolution of the system of interministerial councils is evidence of this. The reserved domain disappeared or, to be precise, expanded little by little to include all the areas in which the president considered, rightly or wrongly, his intervention to be necessary: economic, financial and monetary policy; new technologies; departmental and regional reform; the reorganisation of Paris; the price of agricultural products, and so on (on this presidentialising of decision-taking see E. Burin des Rozières, *Retour aux sources: 1962 l'année décisive*).

By thus subordinating prime minister to president, de Gaulle resolved in his own fashion one of the major risks inherent in the constitution – that of a dyarchy in which there coexisted a president elected by universal suffrage and a prime minister who had the support of parliament. For de Gaulle these two offices could not be of equivalent status. As the elected choice of the people, the president alone could embody the State, which he had the authority to administer directly when he believed it to be under threat. Only by delegation of this pre-eminent authority could the prime minister



take on, in periods of normality, part of the responsibility. De Gaulle explained the theory behind a conception of power that was very far removed from the letter of the 1958 constitution in his press conference of 31 January 1964.

The spirit of the new constitution resides in the fact that it preserves parliament as the law-making institution while at the same time ensuring that public power is no longer the plaything of the parties but proceeds instead directly from the People ... This means that the head of state, the elected choice of the nation, is at once source and repository of that power ... It is obvious that the president alone holds, and can delegate, the authority which inheres in the State ... But even when it has been understood that the People has entrusted the entire, indivisible authority of the State to the president whom it has elected; that there exists no other power – be it governmental, civil, military or judicial – which is not conferred and upheld by him; and that it is his prerogative to balance the supreme domain that is his own responsibility with those areas whose management he confides to others; everything suggests that in normal times the distinction between the function and the sphere of action of the president and the prime minister should be preserved. (*Discours et messages*, IV, pp. 164–8)

This theory, which brought to completion the process begun in 1958, rested upon two indispensable pre-conditions, neither of which were to be found in the 1958 constitution or in the 1962 amendment. The first was that the prime minister should acknowledge his subordinate position, and the second that parliament should accept the effective removal of its right to control the executive. On the first point de Gaulle took great care to appoint prime ministers – and ministers – who were not party leaders or even party members, since his concern was to protect government from party influence. It is true that Michel Debré was a member of the UNR. But he consistently refused to become its leader and sought to ensure that it became the ‘secular agent’ of the government’s policy rather than an instrument of pressure on it. Neither Georges Pompidou nor Maurice Couve de Murville belonged to a political party. De Gaulle’s principle was that their authority derived exclusively from the presidency; and though one may question how accurate this assertion was in the case of Michel Debré (the prime minister of the 1958 compromise), it unquestionably applied to his successors.

Where did this leave the parliamentary form of the regime provided for in the constitution? The National Assembly retained the right, which it had used in autumn 1962, to censure the government, and successive governments sought votes of confidence from it. But since the resolution of the institutional crisis of 1962, no parliamentary majority has been found in the whole history of the Fifth Republic – and not only in its Gaullist phase – to



vote a motion of censure. The regime enjoyed the historical good fortune that the elections of 1962, 1967 and 1968 all gave the president's party a governing majority. Hence the presidentialist reading of the constitution was made possible by the unconditional support of a parliamentary majority which agreed to become the president's auxiliary.

### *Ministerial stability?*

For de Gaulle the justification of a presidency-dominated system lay in the need to give government that 'effectiveness, stability and accountability' of which it had been deprived in the Fourth Republic. His Republic boasted of the re-establishment of the continuity of public policy that governmental stability made possible, claiming that it enabled proper consideration of policy issues and effective implementation of decisions, elements which had been cruelly lacking in the chronic ministerial instability of the Fourth Republic. In his eleven-year presidency, de Gaulle had only three prime ministers: Michel Debré (1958–62), Georges Pompidou (1962–9) and Maurice Couve de Murville (1968–9). A similar stability applied to those ministers whose responsibilities brought them into direct contact with de Gaulle and who carried out what he regarded as the core policies of the 'reserved domain'. Maurice Couve de Murville was Minister for Foreign Affairs during the whole period 1958–68 and Pierre Messmer spent ten years (1960–9) as Minister of the Armed Forces.

Yet when one turns from the premiership and the major foreign affairs and military portfolios to the other ministerial positions, the picture is very different. Here much movement took place and the succession of ministers reveals clearly enough the difficulties, indeed the crises, that departments had to face and that resulted in a rapid turnover in personnel. Thus such key ministries as Finance, Justice and Agriculture each had five ministers in eleven years. What this demonstrated was that beneath the surface gloss of a government confident of its intentions and possessed of an inflexible political determination capable of overcoming all obstacles to their implementation, a different sort of conflict was taking place whose outcome was much less clear cut. It derived from the resistances – and refusals – which existed within a changing society to forces that were for their part able to profit from these shifting conditions to shape the future in a particular way – forces which did not always originate in the will of government. What made 1962 a break with the past was that parliament henceforth ceased to be the privileged forum for the expression (and periodically the resolution) of such tensions since the existence of a stable presidential majority in the National Assembly meant that the latter's formerly important function of channelling discontent withered away. The consequence was that the social problems which we shall describe later



expressed themselves in the street and in direct pressure on government. This in turn resulted in ministerial reshuffles which, without seriously threatening overall governmental stability, signalled the existence of political crisis in a period of direct democracy.

Yet the fact that government was subject to the pressure of direct action demonstrates also that, in a polity where parties are the legitimate mechanisms for the expression of opinion, a party system that had been in crisis since the Fourth Republic was now, after its crushing defeat in 1962, in a state of virtual collapse. On the ruins of this system new political forces began painfully to assert their existence, though they as yet hardly looked capable of becoming the authorised voice of public opinion.

### *The president's party: from the UNR to the UDV*

Created in 1958 out of the scattered groups of political Gaullism (the Free French Gaullists, the veterans of the RPF and the social republicans, the members of the numerous associations which sought to reorganise the regime around a strengthened executive), the UNR sought from the beginning to be the agent of support for de Gaulle's action. This ambition was not without its own difficulties when one remembers that the leader whom it wished to help was determined above all else to liberate the State from the influence of political parties. Thus the Union pour la nouvelle république (UNR) saw itself not as a party but as an anti-party. A party is, as its name indicates, a faction and divides the national community by representing only a part of it; Gaullism by contrast sought to rally the French behind the head of state in a 'Gaullist movement' that was a union and not a party. A political party is, at least in France, organised around an ideology that constitutes its cement; but Gaullism denied the validity of the Right-Left cleavage and refused, since its objective was to represent national unanimity, to drape itself in an ideology. The goal of a party is to conquer the State and make it the agent of its solutions; but Gaullism regarded the State as superior to the groups and individuals which composed it, and proclaimed a desire to serve it in order to strengthen the nation.

These points notwithstanding, the UNR fulfilled all the functions of a political party, notably the mobilisation of electors necessary to in a democracy. Its objective in so doing was not to use the parliamentary power which it thereby gained to control government, but rather to control parliament so that de Gaulle's hands stayed free. The attempts made by Jacques Soustelle in 1958-60 and by Albin Chalandon in 1959 to give the UNR some autonomy *vis-à-vis* the government were both unsuccessful. After the 1961 Strasbourg conference the issue was settled. Jacques Richard, the secretary general, used the term 'the unconditionals' to



describe the UNR membership, and a deputy summed up the Gaullists' role as the president's parliamentary army by calling them the 'General's lobby fodder'. Their loyalty was unconditional and, it should be said, very poorly rewarded. In his determination to free the State from the tentacles of the parties, de Gaulle made no exception for the one which spoke in his name; he treated it with lofty disregard. At each legislative election the UNR was expected to merge itself into a larger Gaullist grouping where it would play a subordinate role and receive no special rewards for its loyalty. Thus in 1962 André Malraux created an Association pour la V<sup>e</sup> République which distributed parliamentary candidatures, and five years later, in 1967, Georges Pompidou founded a parallel organisation, the Comité d'action pour la V<sup>e</sup> République. Given these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the UNR led a troubled existence. Between 1958 and 1969 it got through no fewer than seven general secretaries, all of whom found themselves caught between the Elysée, the government and the deputies: Roger Frey (1958–9), Albin Chalandon (1959), Jacques Richard (1959–61), Roger Dusseaulx (1961–2), Louis Terrenoire (1962), Jacques Baumel (1962–7) and Robert Poujade (1967–9). The task of these men was less to lead the party than to transmit to party members the policy initiatives that came via the Hôtel Matignon from the presidential palace. Hence the UNR was a different type of party from the traditional ones. It was not organised around a political tradition or ideology for the purpose of winning power; the aim was rather to be the army of those who had formed up around de Gaulle, and as such to enable him to win public approval not for a doctrine, but for a concept of how public power should be organised.

From this basic difference stemmed many others. The early leaders of the UNR did not want it to be a mass party where the membership could impose its will on congresses with the inevitable development of factionalism. They sought instead a party of managers and electors; Roger Frey prescribed that membership should come from France's élite. Thus the UNR did not have a large membership – in 1959 it claimed 25,000 paid-up supporters, and in 1962 86,000, figures which are doubtless exaggerated. A similar logic informed party organisation. Though posts of authority were supposed to be decided by election, this was often a mere formality. The most prominent positions – the presidencies of the National Assembly and of the parliamentary groups, and the general secretaryship of the movement – were all designated by the Hôtel Matignon following consultation with the Elysée. Until 1963 the secretaries of departmental federations were elected (though there was always an official candidate), but in that year Jacques Baumel had it decided that henceforth they should be appointed by the general secretary himself. The peculiar characteristics of the UNR also acknowledge its diverse nature. Though joined together in



support of the actions of one man and of his vision of a strong executive, the Gaullists differed widely in their political opinions. The membership of the UNR in 1958 stretched from the Centre-Left (the former left wing of the social republicans under Jacques Chaban-Delmas) to the extreme Right (supporters of French Algeria like Colonel Thomazo). In 1962 the extreme Right split off and, as if in compensation, the amalgamation with the Left Gaullists of the UDT provided the movement with a left wing. It is in fact difficult to situate the UNR on the political spectrum when one adds together the conservative wing of the ex-social republicans under Roger Frey, technocrats of the Albin Chalandon type, and Social Christians like Edmond Michelet and Louis Terrenoire. Its real originality resided ultimately less in its character – which was difficult to define – than in its function. For the UNR found its true identity, as Jacques Chaban-Delmas had hoped, in playing the role that the Radical Party had once played – that of a party of government which could take on the characteristics of the political culture held by the dominant social groups in early 1960s France. Its strength lay in its ability to transmit to public opinion the image which the latter, however confusedly, had of what it wished to be. The UNR was the prophet of strong and effective government, of a meritocracy that had no use for the faded slogans of the parties. It drew its strength from the upper reaches of the salaried middle class, from the cadres whose rise symbolised France's entry into an age of growth. In turning pragmatism into a virtue through which the national interest could be advanced, the UNR came to represent the political arm of modern France. It was the party for which those French who had no interest in extremism of Left or Right could vote, the party which was carrying out France's adaption to the new world of the mid-twentieth century. And in this respect its success was spectacular. The Gaullist movement, together with the various satellites that existed in its wake, gained 20.4 per cent of the votes in 1958, nearly 32 per cent in 1962 and 37.7 per cent in 1967 (with the independent republicans). In 1968, together with its allies, it won 46 per cent of the vote – almost an absolute majority.

Its role as the instrument of power became even stronger once Georges Pompidou became prime minister. The UNR was unhappy at the removal of Michel Debré, one of its own, in 1962, and his replacement by a man who was not even a party member. Thus the new prime minister did not have an easy time with a movement whose leading figures were the 'historical' Gaullists who had been loyal to de Gaulle since the Resistance and the early days of the RPF. Nevertheless Pompidou assumed the task of leader of the majority in 1962 and steadily tightened his control, particularly once he took the initiative in the restructuring of the movement that occurred in 1967. At the Lille conference in November 1967, the movement decided to broaden its base by incorporating new groups that



had hitherto remained on the periphery. To do this, it changed its name to the Union des démocrates pour la V<sup>e</sup> République which became, after the 1968 crisis, the Union pour la défense de la République. At the same time its statutes were revised and, most important, a renewal of party personnel took place with the replacement of the generation of 'historical Gaullists' by RPF figures who had come to Gaullism, as Pompidou had done, after the Second World War and were utterly committed to a prime minister to whom they owed their advancement. Step by step the Gaullist movement had evolved into a docile weapon in the hands of government.

Thus a new term entered the lexicon of French political conceptions, the 'majority party', the paradox being that the political group that assumed this privileged status derived no personal benefit from it since its essential vocation was to provide unconditional parliamentary support for the executive. Such a phenomenon was only possible where there existed an inter-class party that transcended doctrinal cleavages. Yet if this was the self-defined goal of the Gaullist movement, the reality was rather different. For all the existence of a Gaullist Left, the movement's centre of gravity clearly lay to the Right. That this was the case owed less to leadership preference than to the fact that the French Left, for all its two defeats in 1958 and 1962, was still organisationally and electorally alive, whereas the Right had collapsed and had abandoned its political territory to Gaullism.

### *The collapse of the Right*

Although the dynamic effects of an expanding Gaullism had initially made the Right one of France's largest political forces in 1958, it subsequently became the principal victim of the battle of 1962. Broken up into fragments, it virtually disappeared from the political landscape. This was particularly true of the extreme Right, which had been dealt a terminal blow by the destruction of the OAS and the imprisonment or exile of its leaders. The one-time members of Jeune Nation or the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes came together in two groups, neither of which would have any influence on public opinion. *Europe-Action*, the monthly journal run by Dominique Venner, sought to replace a defeated activism with a coherent nationalist doctrine based on such themes as the defence of Europe, the racial superiority of the West, and the cult of honour and youth. The other group was the movement Occident, created in 1964 by Alain Madelin with members like Gérard Longuet and François Duprat. Lacking any doctrinal basis it specialised in the use of violence against communists – or any one else whom it regarded as communist.

The traditional Right was also in pieces. The Centre national des indépendants, until recently the second largest component of the majority, was now reduced to the position of a peripheral supporting body whose



moment had passed. The elderly notables who had formed its backbone disappeared from politics. Defeated in the 1962 elections, Paul Reynaud died in 1966. Antoine Pinay remained the great hope of the moderates; but he waited in vain for the call to be the saviour of post-Gaullism, and in 1965 he announced his refusal to challenge de Gaulle in the first direct election for the presidency. The right wing of the CNIP, which had identified closely with the cause of French Algeria, was dragged down in the collapse of the extreme Right. So precipitous was the descent of the classic Right that only one section of it was left standing after the 1962 election – the parliamentary group of independent republicans under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Even this was a pretty heterogeneous collection, without internal coherence, since its membership stretched from those who had voted 'yes' in the 1962 referendum to deputies who had been elected with the backing of the cartel of noes. The independent republicans had made their choice less through conviction than from a desire to ensure a (threatened) political survival. Their great problem, moreover, was to combine membership of the Gaullist family with the assertion of an autonomous identity that would stop them being swallowed up by the UNR. Until 1967, this assertion took the form of a demand for primaries within the majority so that the elections would produce a separate group of *gaullisant* moderates. This strategy was nullified by Pompidou's insistence in 1967 that there should be a single majority candidate in each constituency. It was in order to avoid being completely taken over that Giscard d'Estaing, after his removal from office in January 1966, decided to create an independent organisation. In June 1967 he founded the *Fédération des républicains-indépendants* which he defined as 'liberal, centrist and European' – qualities that were supposed to distinguish it from a UNR that was thereby implicitly characterised as dirigist, rightist and nationalist. The independent republicans made no secret of their ambition to gather into their ranks the descendants of the moderates and opposition centrists. In a press conference of 10 January 1967, Giscard defined the attitude of his supporters to the majority in a phrase that became famous: 'Yes, but'. He clarified his meaning thus: 'Yes to the majority but with the firm intention of influencing its choices. Our *but* is not a rejection but an addition . . . in three dimensions: a more liberal functioning of institutions, the establishment of a genuinely modern economic and social policy, the construction of Europe.'

The independent republicans thus formed a small cohort of moderates alongside the majority Gaullist party of which they were at once ally and rival. Yet with a parliamentary group whose membership varied from thirty to sixty depending on the election results, they were hardly in a position to affect the regime's decisions, given that any break with Gaullism would condemn them to electoral death. They were hence reduced to the



status of a hinge group, associated with the exercise of power but not with the realities of decision-taking. Their aim was essentially to lay the foundation of a post-Gaullism that would give them back their freedom.

*Rebuilding the Left: immobilism and change in the Communist Party*

Given that the axe of the Gaullist-independent majority lay on the Right, the Left provided the core of the opposition, in particular the Communist Party, which remained throughout de Gaulle's Republic its most significant electoral force. In the four parliamentary elections held between 1958 and 1969 the party consistently polled 20 per cent of the vote. Although this figure was below the 25 per cent won in the Fourth Republic, it showed French communism's capacity to hold on to the bulk of its electoral positions. The party was the principal opposition force within the system, a fact which appeared to vindicate Malraux's prophecy in the RPF period that 'one day the only forces left in France will be the communists and ourselves'.

It did indeed appear to be the case that the French Communist Party, having suffered in 1958 the consequences of the dual shocks of the 1956 Soviet intervention in Hungary and Khrushchev's secret speech, had managed to staunch the haemorrhage that it had endured because of its stifling administrative rigidity and its refusal to abandon the ideological monolithism of the Stalinist era. Maurice Thorez's strategy involved a refusal to publicise the Khrushchev report which risked challenging the correctness of party theses proclaimed on the authority of its general secretary. It also led to the exclusion from positions of authority of all those who criticised the errors of analysis Thorez had made – Marcel Servin, Laurent Casanova, the leaders of the union of communist students, and so on. It led finally to the rejection of the renovators' attempts to offer a less rigidly mechanistic analysis of Gaullism through which it became the nationalist branch of 'monopoly power' and the representative of an authoritarian State capitalism that aimed to defend national interests against a 'cosmopolitan branch' of the same monopoly that was ready to export capital and was indifferent to these national interests. Once the heretics had been excommunicated in 1961, Henri Claude articulated the communist analysis of the Fifth Republic around three propositions. Gaullism was a form of personal power based on the use of the plebiscitary referendum, the 1958 constitution and the existence of a single party; this personal power enabled the direct rule of the banks and was thus the façade behind which the monopolistic banking groups exercised the reality of power; hence the new regime was needed by the monopolies who, in a critical stage of capitalist evolution, required the complete subordination of the State and could no longer tolerate parliamentarism.



With the party now firmly under control, Thorez was able in 1962 to make some movement: at the Malakoff meeting of the central committee in December, he inaugurated the politics of *détente* and of a very modest destalinisation by laying emphasis on the struggle against 'dogmatism' rather than on denunciations of 'opportunism'. More substantial gestures came after the death of Thorez on 11 July 1964 and his replacement by Waldeck Rochet. The latter had declared in private on becoming deputy secretary general in 1961 that 'for something to change in the Church you have to wait for the death of the Pope'. He now set the party on the path of 'openness', and the modernisation that followed did much to preserve the position of the PCF between 1964 and 1969 as the most credible opposition force. Thus the party supported Mitterrand's candidature in the 1965 presidential election; signed a pact with the non-communist left in 1966 for the second round of parliamentary elections; proposed as early as 1964 a common programme of government; decided at its thirteenth congress in January 1967 to 'create the conditions for a peaceful transition to socialism' and to abandon the political ghetto in which it had been confined since 1947; denounced the cult of the personality and the single party; and took the advice of the philosopher Roger Garaudy that it should establish contacts with Christian groups. So successful was this process that by 1967 the party looked capable of mobilising the French Left around an apparently reformist project. Yet these short-term tactics in no sense challenged the party's doctrinal rigidity on the long-term goals of the communist movement. Thus 'openness' seemed all the more dangerous to the enemies of communism in that it was intended to promote societal goals whose theoretical bases had not changed. The distrust with which its potential partners viewed a communist future was not allayed by the softening of the means intended to achieve it. These partners, however, had little to set against the communist initiatives of 1964-7, and continued on a decline that the post-1962 attempts at reconstruction were unable to halt.

### *The crisis of the non-communist Left*

De Gaulle's return to power deepened the crisis in which the non-communist Left had found itself since the Fourth Republic, and which by now appeared terminal. This decline was primarily due to the profound decay that had gripped the Socialist Party (SFIO). Torn between congress motions enthusiastically voted by activists committed to Marxist orthodoxy and a political style that obliged the SFIO to compromise with realities far removed from its theoretical beliefs, the French Socialist Party was stuck fast in its own contradictions. It had great difficulty in reconciling the interests of the ideologists; the urban managers who ran the big cities (such as Gaston Defferre in Marseilles and Augustin Laurent in Lille); and the



political managers grouped around Guy Mollet at party headquarters, who were above all concerned to ensure the party's survival in a hostile environment. The consequence was a series of splits, expulsions and resignations which weakened its potential membership. By 1960 the party had only 80,000 members, and women and young people were invisible in its sclerotic and bureaucratic apparatus. The uncertainty of its response to Gaullism added to the party's problems. Having first accepted de Gaulle's return, it voted for the constitutional referendum of 1958 (which brought about the departure of the future PSA). It withdrew from government in 1959, engaged in moderate opposition to Gaullism until the signing of the Evian agreement, and then became one of the fiercest opponents of the constitutional revision of 1962 and as such the core element in the cartel of noes. Yet even then its tactical line was confused, since Guy Mollet successively advocated a right-wing alliance for the first round of the 1962 elections, and then a Popular Front style electoral pact with the communists for round two. The 12.6 per cent of the vote won by the party in the November 1962 elections appeared to suggest that it was moving towards the political fringe. Yet all attempts at renewal seemed blocked by Mollet's control of the party. Backed by the two big federations of Nord and Pas-de-Calais, firmly in control of the party notables who dominated the bulk of the party apparatus and a master of the art of congress management, the general secretary symbolised within his party the permanence of a Guesdist tradition that guaranteed his position by the strict observance of Marxist doctrine. Outside the party, Mollet incarnated a stagnation which revealed itself in the lack of any direct impact on current political realities. The most he did was to encourage groups within the party that had the potential to appeal to young people and to sections of the middle classes who were repelled by his own immobilism and archaism. Among these were the Centre d'études, de recherches et d'éducation socialistes, founded in 1964 and run by Jean-Pierre Chevènement and Didier Motchane with the backing of a number of socialist students and of the Amicale des postiers socialistes which advocated a programme of the union of the Left; and the Centre d'études et de promotion, founded by Pierre Mauroy, which brought together the remnants of the socialist students and the Fédération Léo-Lagrange and sought to make the SFIO the basis of a French social democracy similar to that found in Northern European parties.

The marginalisation against which the SFIO struggled was by now the definitive fate of the Radical Party. Under the presidencies of Félix Gaillard (1958–61), Maurice Faure (1961–5) and René Billières (1965–9) the Radical Party virtually ceased to count in national politics. Its two defeats of 1958 and 1962 had reduced its electoral support to about 7.5 per cent of votes cast and some twenty seats. After the 1962 election it joined up with



the handful of UDSR deputies who supported François Mitterrand to create the Rassemblement démocratique. The existence of a conservative majority in the National Assembly meant that the Rassemblement démocratique could not even aspire to the position of a hinge group. It was by now evident that the only choice left to radicalism was that of deciding which larger formation its last survivors should seek to integrate. The choice lay, in other words, between the creation of a grouping of the non-communist Left and the construction of a centrist alliance. Radicalism's future thus merged with the attempts of the opposition to construct a new party system to replace the one which had collapsed in 1962.

### *Attempts to rebuild the non-communist Left*

The first attempts by the Left to recover from the crisis which it had experienced since the end of the Fourth Republic came from outside the SFIO. A large, if amorphous, community began to form on the Left. It was composed of those who had quit the major parties, together with the members of the clubs which had sprung up in the early 1960s in an attempt to create a more relevant political discourse for an expanding France than that articulated by parties locked into the ideologies of the nineteenth century. In reality this modern Left articulated two very different projects which would not succeed in coming together until 1969.

The first project was rigorously doctrinal. The aim was to modernise a political thought that was by now manifestly unsuited to the realities of the twentieth century, and to articulate proposals that would express the attitude of its supporters to such phenomena as neo-capitalism, the impact on the working class of new forms of production, the emergence of the Third World and neo-colonialism. Such reflection on how the Left should respond to the new world of the 1960s was primarily the work of the Parti socialiste unifié. The PSU was founded on 10 April 1960 by the dissident socialists of the PSA (Edouard Depreux, André Philip, Daniel Mayer, and so on) who joined up with Mendès France and his supporters and the dissident communists of the *Tribune du communisme* (Jean Poperon) plus the Union de la gauche socialiste. Small in membership but rich in ideas, the PSU became the forum for the development of themes that would inspire a whole generation seeking to modernise the Left. Its influence spread far beyond its few thousand members, for example in the columns of the weekly *France-Observateur* (which in 1964 became the *Nouvel Observateur*). It was all-powerful in the leadership and membership of the student union, the Union nationale des étudiants de France (UNEF) which had become, thanks to its opposition to the Algerian war, an important political force, and it also inspired sections of the trade union movement. This was particularly true of the left wing of the Confédération française des travaill-



eurs chrétiens (CFTC) which in 1964, supported by 70 per cent of its membership, decided to drop its religious coloration and to change its name to the Confédération française et démocratique du travail (CFDT). A similar ideal inspired the political clubs to reject involvement in immediate political concerns in favour of a more general reflection on the political education of the citizenry, the structures of the State and the organisation of the economy. The most important of the clubs was the Club Jean-Moulin, founded in 1958. Its membership of top civil servants, academics and members of the liberal professions worked together to draft dossiers and surveys. Among other similar groups were Citoyens 60, which emerged out of the Catholic organisation Vie nouvelle and contained many leading figures in the scouting movement; the Cercle Tocqueville at Lyons; and the Marseilles-based Démocratie nouvelle.

The culmination of this intellectual attempt to provide the Left with a modern platform that suited the period came with the Grenoble colloquium in 1966, attended by Pierre Mendès France, the PSU leadership, left-wing intellectuals like Maurice Duverger and Jean-Marie Domenach, Christians from Esprit and Témioignage chrétien, trade union officials from the CFDT and the Centre national des jeunes agriculteurs. A series of reports on the State, industrial democracy, planning and so on laid the foundations for a major restructuring of the political thought of the Left. It was at Grenoble that the Left became aware of a youthful top civil servant who hid behind the pseudonym Michel Servant and would soon become, under his real name Michel Rocard, the principal leader of the PSU.

Far removed from this intellectual approach to the modernisation of the Left, and in some ways a rival to it, was the second, exclusively political strategy. The idea here was to come to terms with the constitutional novelty of a directly elected president, and to make it the basis for a reshaping of the political organisations of the Left. The new rules of the game required larger groupings than the old parties, a development that appeared all the more plausible in that the latter appeared incapable of profiting from a reform which they had passionately condemned, and were in any case much weakened by their 1962 defeat. Thus the political attempts to reconstruct the Left were all based on acceptance of the principle of the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage; and they all came from outside the established parties.

The first such initiative came from the weekly journal *L'Express*. On 19 September 1963 the formerly pro-Mendès France journal, which was still run by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, drew up an ideal portrait of a mysterious 'Monsieur X', claimed to be the best candidate that the opposition could run against de Gaulle in the presidential election scheduled for December 1965. It soon became clear that *L'Express* considered this ideal candidate to be Gaston Defferre, the deputy-mayor of Marseilles. Though



Defferre won the backing of sections of the intellectual Left (members of clubs like Jean-Moulin and Citoyens 60, jurists, journalists, and so on), the principal problems he had to resolve concerned the political platform on which he would fight and the nature of the political forces on which he proposed to rely. Having rejected any alliance with the Communist Party, Defferre accepted the constitutional principles of the Fifth Republic, though he proposed modifications to article 16, to the powers of the Constitutional Council and to the referendum procedure. This position led the Communist Party and the PSU (which refused to accept the institutional rules) to oppose his candidature. Alongside the clubs, Defferre won the support of some – but not all – radicals, including the party president Maurice Faure; of the MRP, which declared its willingness to merge in a centrist grouping; and, eventually, of the SFIO, whose general secretary Mollet remained, however, extremely reticent. In the spring of 1965, Defferre attempted to organise these various supporting groups into what he hoped would be a potentially majoritarian organisation, the *Fédération démocrate socialiste*. The idea was supported by the members of the Left clubs, the *Rassemblement démocratique*, and the leaderships of the Radical Party and the MRP. The socialists, however, were very dubious, and their ultimate agreement was accompanied by a whole series of conditions imposed by Guy Mollet who insisted that the *Fédération* should openly affirm its socialism and its commitment to secularism and should establish a dialogue with the Communist Party. In establishing conditions that the MRP leadership could not accept, Mollet was able, in June 1965, to torpedo the plan for a ‘grand federation’. Its failure revealed the incompatibility between socialists and centrists and, even more, the fact that loyalty to the traditional parties and to the political culture of the past went deeper than the thrust towards unity required by the new rules of the political game.

From the ruins of this first project emerged the second – and on the surface much more successful – attempt to reconstruct the Left. As before, it came from the initiative of an individual, in this case François Mitterrand. But this time the ideological base was more compatible with the traditions of French political culture in that the goal was to reconstruct the ‘republican party’ of the Third Republic. After his rejection by the PSA, Mitterrand gathered the debris of the UDSR into a political club, the *Ligue pour le combat républicain*, which he founded in 1959. In 1964 this merged with a radical club, the *Club des Jacobins*, that Charles Hernu had founded in 1951 and that had subsequently become a centre for the Mendesist current. The new organisation was called the *Centre d’action institutionnel*. A few months later this in turn amalgamated with a whole series of republican clubs (*Citoyens 60*, *Jeune république*, *Ligue des droits de l’Homme*) to form the *Convention des institutions républicaines* with



Mitterrand as its president. Mitterrand used the Convention as the basis for his September 1965 decision to stand for the presidency, and set out a programme and a model of party reorganisation to the left of that put forward by Defferre. His political platform involved contacts, though not negotiations, with the Communist Party which gave him its support. The PSU did likewise, though only with much hesitation given its unwillingness to dirty its hands in political horse-trading. In the light of the failure of the 'grand federation', Mitterrand then took the fundamental step of creating a new political structure, the *Fédération de la gauche démocratique et socialiste* (FGDS), to bring together the non-communist Left – but not the Centrists. The *Fédération* was first mooted in July 1965 and came into being on 10 September through the linking-up of the SFIO, the Radical Party and the *Convention des institutions républicaines*. The attempts of the Left to adapt its structures to the new institutional framework did not succeed in achieving a synthesis between programmatic renewal and organisational reconstruction. Meanwhile the Centre too was trying to preserve a future in a political context that had become distinctly unfriendly.

#### *The Centre seeks its survival*

Immediately after the defeat of 1962 the two representatives of French centrism, radicals and Christian Democrats, both sought survival via sanctuary in broader political groupings. Both appeared to aim at the reconstruction of a 'third-force' coalition of the sort that had governed France between 1947 and 1952 in the teeth of the opposition of Gaullists and communists. This was the goal of Maurice Faure, the president of the Radical Party, who, in between the two rounds of the 1962 election, urged the 'parties of the Centre and the Left to overcome their sectarian differences and come together in a broad alliance located between the majority and the communists'. This desire for unity initially led the radicals to form a parliamentary group called the 'democratic rally', bringing together, under the leadership of Maurice Faure, politicians like André Morice, the founder of the *Centre républicain*, François Mitterrand and Edouard Bonnefous from the UDSR, and former radicals like Bernard Lafay and Jacques Duhamel. But the leaders of the 'rally' had higher ambitions and entered into negotiations with the socialists and the MRP. The latter had also learned the lessons of its 1962 defeat, and at its La Baule conference the following year decided to change both its leadership – Jean Lecanuet became president and Joseph Fontanet general secretary – and its strategy: henceforth it accepted the idea of a broad Centrist party capable of defeating both communists and Gaullists.

The initial version of this broad Centre party came into being in April



1963 with the formation of the Centre de liaison des démocrates in which there participated, alongside the MRP and the Rassemblement démocratique, representatives of the anti-Gaullist independents and trade unionists from the Confédération générale des cadres (CGC), the CFTC and the farming union FNSEA (Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles). The establishment of a programme, however, came up against the basic problem of whether or not the proposed rally should extend as far as the socialists who had in the past been members of the third force and the cartel of noes. The Defferre project, and the failure of the plan for a 'broad federation', proved that the socialists and the Centrists could not co-exist; but it also split the Centrists since the radical component of the Rassemblement démocratique opted instead for Mitterrand's FGDS.

Hence the axis of the formations which opposed Gaullism yet could not identify with the FGDS was on the Centre-Right. As with the Left, the rally of the Centre organised around a presidential hopeful. In the absence of Antoine Pinay, who preferred to take on the role of unifier only after Gaullism had disappeared, the president of the MRP Jean Lecanuet, emerged as the favourite of the Centre. He had the backing of his own party, of a CNIP that after 1962 no longer had any political future, of a number of radicals and radical sympathisers like Maurice Faure, and of the liberal elements within the UDSR around René Pleven and Eugène Claudius Petit. Atlanticism, Europe and liberalism, hostility to both Gaullism and communism, were the trademarks of a grouping that Lecanuet hoped to turn into a federation once the presidential election was over. The withdrawal of Maurice Faure and his allies, who were obliged by the Radical Party under its new president René Billières to join the FGDS, meant that the new formation was now confined to the Centre-Right.

The period around 1965 hence showed that France was living its age of growth in an institutional and political framework that had been wholly reshaped by the Fifth Republic. The constitutional reform of 1962 completed the construction of the semi-presidential regime inaugurated in 1958. Henceforth the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage would be the decisive event in French politics since it determined the contours of government for the length of the presidential mandate. And during the same period, the party system inherited from the Fourth (and indeed the Third) Republic saw the difficulties of the 1950s culminate in the annihilation that followed its last-ditch stand against the new regime. On its ruins there began to emerge a new party system. The Communist Party forms a special case. It sought to preserve its doctrinal absolutes while conceding to the spirit of the times a timid liberalisation of its political practice; it also continued to pose as the intransigent opponent of the regime. There were, however, three new political forces which did accept the institutional structure of the Fifth Republic and which came



together around would-be presidents (*présidentiables*). These were the Gaullist movement and its Giscardien annex; the Fédération de la gauche démocratique et socialiste that brought together the bulk of the non-communist Left around François Mitterrand; and the Centre démocratique a Centre-Right formation headed by Jean Lecanuet. Thus a new political landscape emerged in the Fifth Republic.



## The golden age of growth

The new political system established after 1958 is central to an understanding of the Gaullist Republic. Yet this can only properly be understood by taking into consideration the revolutionary changes produced by the phenomenon of economic growth. The period of de Gaulle's rule falls squarely within the 'thirty glorious years' that saw France make a qualitative leap forward into the age of continuous growth after its age of penury and the subsequent period of reconstruction distorted by colonial wars. The social consequences – on lifestyles, behaviour and values – were such that France's profile changed more between 1945 and 1970 than it had done in the whole of the preceding century. Growth led to a real watershed in the nation's history in the years between 1958 and 1974. And this in turn raises the question of how to evaluate the respective importance to France's economic growth of global factors (over which government had no control), of the political legacy of the Fourth Republic and of the decisions taken by succeeding governments.

### *The legacy of the Fourth Republic and the Pinay-Rueff plan*

Among the furious denunciations of the defects of the Fourth Republic made by de Gaulle and his supporters when in opposition, a prominent place was reserved for its economic and financial failures: the depletion of public finances, the budget deficit, the burden of overseas debt and the cancer of inflation. Once installed in power on the ruins of the dead Republic, de Gaulle in no way moderated the severity of his critique (he said of the Treasury in June 1958 that 'I found the coffers empty'). As if to deny the myth that he regarded economic and social questions as being of secondary importance (a myth symbolised by the fabricated remark he is alleged to have made that 'supply can look after itself'), de Gaulle insists in his *Memoirs of Hope* on the importance he attached to economic and financial issues which he saw as the 'necessary foundations of power, influence and grandeur and also of that 'relative degree of well-being and security for a nation that we are accustomed, the world being as it is, to call



happiness' (*Mémoires d'espair*, p. 167). He claimed further that 'as France's leader this was the reason why in times of crisis as in times of calm, economic and social problems never ceased to be at the centre of my actions and my preoccupations. To them I devoted well over half of my work, my audience, my visits and my speeches' (*ibid.*, pp. 168–9).

The juxtaposition of de Gaulle's two statements on the weakness of the Fourth Republic and the preoccupation of its successor with economic questions would imply that the Fifth Republic was the sole architect of French economic success. The reality is actually much more complex and the legacy of the preceding regime more balanced. The Fourth Republic had effected a transformation of structures and mentalities that provided the foundations on which the Fifth was able to build the growth of the period 1958 to 1973. The major structural reforms carried out at the time of the Liberation had provided the state with levers that enabled it to play a leading role in economic and financial management: energy, public transport and credit supply via the Bank of France, the principal clearing banks and the insurance companies. Inaugurated in 1947, the planning process made government the leading architect of the process of economic and infrastructure modernisation. Social cohesion and stability were guaranteed by the creation of a social security system that sought to correct the inequalities suffered by the least well off through the installation of welfare payments in case of sickness, pregnancy and invalidity. Parallel with the birth of the theory that the State should guarantee and protect the French people against the risks of everyday life went the emergence of other ideas that were to have profound effects on French attitudes towards economic realities: awareness of the importance of investment and of concepts of profitability, productivity and regional development. The other legacy of the Fourth Republic to its successor was a new attitude towards the international economy marked by the replacement of protectionist traditions with a new determination to open up France's frontiers to competition. The culmination of this was to be the signing in 1957 of the Treaty of Rome that gave birth to the Common Market. In all these areas the Fifth Republic simply realised the considerable profits derived from the work of its predecessor.

There was also, it must be said, a negative balance sheet – the state of public finances. The Fourth Republic had accumulated budgetary deficits, and in order to finance the costs of reconstruction and modernisation had burdened the country with an enormous public debt, the interest payments on which seriously affected the government's freedom of economic manoeuvre. It had also resorted to permanent inflation as a means of financing expenditure, an inflation that was partially stabilised in 1952–5, but then took off again strongly with the outbreak of the Algerian war. Given that the balance of payments was in chronic deficit, it becomes easy



to understand why the value of the franc was in continual decline. Devalued six times since the Liberation, in the spring of 1958 the franc underwent the so-called 'operation 20 per cent' of the Gaillard government which amounted to a further (hidden) devaluation of the same amount. (On the economic and financial situation at the end of the Fourth Republic, see J. P. Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, chapter 16.)

The state of the economic inheritance led de Gaulle's government, as soon as it was in place in June 1958, to undertake the restoration of the financial and monetary position. To realise his aims, de Gaulle decided to appoint the Moderate Antoine Pinay as his Finance Minister. It was a choice made after some hesitation, and on the strength of François Bloch Laine's conviction that the success of the proposed policy required the presence at the rue de Rivoli of a man who was the idol of the small saver and of the traditional business community, and who symbolised confidence and the defence of the franc. Yet it was to be as spokesman for – rather than as architect of – the new policy that de Gaulle chose a man whom he regarded as the incarnation of the mediocrity of parliamentarism.

That said, the confidence which Antoine Pinay inspired greatly facilitated the re-ordering of public accounts which enabled the Fifth Republic to establish itself on a solid basis. The first step was to take the emergency measures required by the situation, in particular the payment to the Treasury of the funds needed to pay the public expenditure bills. This was the goal of the Pinay loan launched in June 1958 on very favourable terms; its success showed that the Pinay–de Gaulle tandem was attractive to both the business and the saving communities. This favourable climate, together with the sternly proclaimed determination to put an end to the financial laxity of the Fourth Republic, explains why the country accepted with relative ease a series of austerity measures that were justified by the government as necessary sacrifices to permit the hoped-for recovery: delay in the agreed increases in civil servant pay and agricultural prices; the taxation of commercial profits; an increase in company taxation and the price of petrol; and suspension of grants and credits. It was a set of measures designed to bring down the budget deficit and inflation and to tighten consumption so as to encourage exports. Taken by Antoine Pinay with de Gaulle's approval, those measures could, however, do no more than plug the holes in the economy.

De Gaulle wanted much more, namely a complete turnaround in France's economic and financial position equivalent to the political transformation which would prepare France for entry into the Common Market. With this objective in mind he brushed aside Pinay's reservations and created a committee of experts in September 1958, chaired by Jacques Rueff, the theoretician of liberalism and former adviser to Raymond Poincaré. The committee's brief was to devise plans for long-term economic



stabilisation. When in December the Pinay–Rueff plan appeared, the former's name was included purely to prevent him losing face since his doubts about the enterprise were well known and he had several times threatened to resign if the plan were adopted as it stood. There were three central planks to the plan which was to form the basis for the economic growth of the period 1958–63.

The first plank, regarded by the plan-makers as primordial, was the fight against an inflation that, by putting the balance of payments into deficit, appeared to be the greatest threat to the country's international position. To end this situation the State budget was subjected to a severe squeeze. Under the heading of expenditure, it was decided to limit public-sector pay increases to 4 per cent, to reduce the subsidies for the nationalised companies and social security, and to withdraw in 1959 the pension paid to able-bodied ex-servicemen. To bolster government income, further increases occurred in taxation on companies and high incomes, alcohol and tobacco, together with an overall raising of public-sector charges (gas, electricity, transport, coal and postal services).

The second plank was monetary and sought to improve the stability of the franc by giving it the competitive advantage that would enable French products to compete on international markets. To this end the franc was devalued by 17.5 per cent, a move that was accompanied by two symbolic measures. The first was psychological and sought to restore the dignity of the currency by conferring on it a value that it had lost through successive devaluations. The existing franc was replaced by a 'new franc' or 'heavy franc' worth 100 old francs so as to give it parity with strong currencies like the German mark or the Swiss franc. The second measure – abolishing all index-linking except for the 'vital minimum' of the minimum wage (SMIC) – showed the determination to fight against monetary inflation.

The third plank was without question the most important in that it concerned the future rather than the problems of the past. This was the opening-up of markets in order to subject the French economy to international competition and thus stimulate innovation and dynamism. It was decided that from 1 January 1960, 90 per cent of all trade with European markets, and 50 per cent of trade with the dollar zone, should be freed.

The Pinay–Rueff plan came into operation on 1 January 1960 and provided the monetary and financial framework for the remarkable economic expansion that France was to experience. It did so by guaranteeing some exceptionally favourable conditions: a balanced budget, and a very modest increase in wages and in the cost of living. Thus was established the context for the sensational growth that France was to undergo in the Gaullist years.



Table 6. *Average annual growth in gross domestic product, 1959–1970*

Canada	4.9%
USA	3.9%
Japan	11.1%
France	5.8%
West Germany	4.9%
Italy	5.5%
United Kingdom	2.9%

Source: F. Braudel and E. Labrousse, eds., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, Presses universitaires de France, 1982, IV, p. 1012.

### *A spectacular and prolonged growth*

The decade 1959–70, which more or less coincides with de Gaulle's Republic, saw French gross national product grow at its most spectacular rate, a rate that placed France at the head not only of the European countries, but also of the leading industrial countries of the world. Only Japan had a higher growth rate.

This remarkable growth fits into a longer pattern since it came after the (admittedly slower) expansion of the Fourth Republic – an average annual rate of 4.5 per cent between 1949 and 1959 – and continued until 1974, with nearly 7 per cent rates in the more inflationary period of the early 1970s. It was a lengthy period and one that experienced no real crisis given that the slowing-down in the growth rate in 1963 and subsequently did not represent any decline in production.

It is fruitless to try to establish whether or not the causes of this growth should be attributed to the economic policies of the Fifth Republic. For the first point to be made is that the growth that characterised the years from 1945 to 1974 was a phenomenon that affected the whole of the industrialised world. The 'miracles' which occurred in Italy, Germany and Japan preceded and outstripped French growth in the 1950s in such a way that the good results of the 1960s represent a 'catching-up' process that is, in any case, to be linked to a worldwide phenomenon that France did not create – but from which she profited, and never more so than in the years of de Gaulle's Republic. This latter point reflects the linked facts that the government's economic and financial policy enabled the global economic situation to produce its optimal results, that inflation was slowing down and that political stability was assured. It also showed that the Fifth Republic profited from the major structural reforms and achievements of its predecessor. What the analysis of the causes of French growth actually demonstrates is the fairly high degree of continuity between the core economic policies of the two Republics, though one may concede that the



Fifth was more effective in the detail of policy thanks to its greater coherence in decision-taking.

*The causes of growth: the role of the state and the internationalising of the economy*

The state played a major role as director, catalyst, initiator and regulator of the growth process. It was a role that had, in the main, been inherited from the Fourth Republic which had bequeathed to its successor a whole range of institutions and practices designed to enable government to intervene in the nation's economic life. There was firstly the range of statistical information through which fuller knowledge of France's economic position could be acquired: the Planning Commissariat, the Commission of Economic Accounts and Budgets created by Mendès France in 1952, the INSEE and the various information divisions of the government departments provided an abundant supply of data to help accurate decision-taking. The second element was the range of financial weapons available to government: through the scale of public expenditure, the potential use of price control, the control of credit and monetary policy, together with the availability of savings via such parapublic organisations as the Caisse des dépôts et consignations, the state became a major economic player and one that was able to have a decisive impact on national growth. Moreover, the fact that in 1958 there existed 170 public-sector companies which, taken together, were responsible for 13.4 per cent of national production meant that the State had a direct impact on overall performance. After 1947 the totality of these resources was placed at the service of the directives of a plan which established overall national objectives for a five-year period in the economic, social and standard-of-living spheres. This was, of course, 'indicative' or 'flexible' planning in that no attempt was made to challenge the bases of the market economy; the aim was simply to control the latter's development and to correct potential distortions. For de Gaulle it also possessed the virtues of rationality and strategic choice that led him to articulate a veritable mystique of the voluntarism of planning; 'It is all-embracing, it defines objectives and establishes a hierarchy of needs and priorities, it provides decision-takers and even public opinion with a sense of what is important, long-term and organised, and it compensates for the shortcomings of liberty without destroying its advantages; thus I ensured that the preparation and the implementation of the plan had a significance which it had hitherto lacked by giving it the status of an "ardent obligation" and by making it mine' (*Mémoires d'espoir*, I, pp. 171–2).

To take account of the financial crisis that accompanied the end of the Fourth Republic and made the forecasts of the Third Plan (1958–61) redundant, the government prepared an interim plan for 1960–1. During



this latter period it drew up the Fourth Plan (1962–5) which sought to link the evolution of the French economy to the new elements of post-war demographic growth, the implementation of the Common Market and decolonisation. The Fourth Plan was centred on growth – it forecast an annual increase of 5.5 per cent in gross domestic product – and proclaimed the need to allocate the bulk of the new resources to the public-sector infrastructure. Until 1962 the real minister of the economy, with the task of preparing France for international competition, was the prime minister Michel Debré; and since the essential priority was to industrialise the country, his principal collaborator was the Industrial Minister Jean-Marcel Jeanenney. The role of Antoine Pinay, and even more of Wilfrid Baumgartner, his successor at Finance from January 1960 to January 1962, was simply, and strictly, that of finance technician with responsibility for guaranteeing the monetary conditions that would enable safe economic growth. The appointment of Giscard d'Estaing to the finance ministry in January 1962, followed by that of Pompidou as prime minister, led to a modification of the objectives of planning which henceforth took more account of the requirements of the economy. The goal was no longer, as it had been in the 1950s, to increase overall production, but rather to modernise the economic infrastructure so that it would be ready for international competition. Seen from this perspective, the driving role of the State tended to give way to that of the private sector. This was particularly true in the field of investment; the public-sector share of total investment was in continuous decline between 1958–69, while private-sector and household investment rose. The Fifth and Six Plans (1965–70 and 1971–5) saw a parallel decline in state aid to public-sector industry so as to make it more competitive with the private sector. The overwhelming priority, which Pompidou constantly proclaimed, was to create an industry that would compete in international markets.

The objective was clear and so too was the direction in which the State intended to steer the French economy, employing all the information and resources at its disposal: France was to open its frontiers, to abandon the timorous protectionism which had for long characterised its economy, and to accept the fact of competition. The principle had been accepted by the Fourth Republic when it took France into the OECD, signed the treaty creating the Coal and Steel Community and finally took the decisive step of the Treaty of Rome. But it was only in the Fifth Republic that the real consequences were felt. Until then France had cheated on the rules of free trade via a subtle mixture of compensatory taxes and export subsidies that amounted to disguised devaluation. Henceforth the collapse of empire and the logic of Europe combined to make competition the only route available to the most dynamic industrial and financial sectors. In taking it they had the backing of the state which made economic competitiveness a central



plank of its policy. In these circumstances the twin goals of the Treaty of Rome were realised more quickly than the timetable had laid down. The first reduction in customs duties within the six countries of the EEC came into effect on 1 January 1959; on 1 January 1962 tariffs were reduced by 50 per cent, and on 1 July 1968 they were completely abolished. At the same time the flow of trade was liberated by the abolition of import-export quotas in 1960. Following difficult negotiations the 'common agricultural policy' came into effect in 1962 with its system of subsidies and guaranteed prices for the main agricultural products. It should also be noted that the dismantling of protectionist structures did not take place solely within the EEC. The negotiations that took place between 1962 and 1967 in the Dillon and Kennedy rounds laid the foundations for a more general reduction in tariffs.

This internationalising of the French economy led to a remarkable increase in overseas trade and also to changes in its geographical distribution. Exports had constituted less than 10 per cent of French gross domestic product in 1958 – by 1970 they formed 17 per cent. During the same period the percentage of French exports going to EEC countries rose from 10 to 50, while those going to the franc zone declined from 30 to 10. The same was true for imports where the franc zone percentage fell from 23 to 9 while the equivalent figures for the EEC increased from 30 to 49. It took only ten years for the six countries of the EEC (and particularly Germany) to replace the colonies as France's principal trading partner. Yet this change produced its own – and real – problems since France was no longer trading in a restricted zone where it had a near monopoly but in a highly competitive market in which success required commercial dynamism at all levels. Economic restructuring thus had to take place under the constraint of permanent external pressure, and the Fourth and Fifth Plans were dominated by the need to improve overall competitiveness. In November 1959, de Gaulle appointed a commission chaired by Jacques Rueff and Louis Armand to draw up an inventory of the 'rigidities' of the economy and to examine what needed to be done to re-establish the primacy of the price mechanism. The central thrust of government policy was henceforth the creation of French-owned, internationally-sized companies, since only these would be strong enough to make the investment, research, product innovation and marketing effort that would enable them to meet the challenge of an international competition that had become the guiding principle of the French economy.

#### *Explanations of growth: company and product modernisation*

The key player in the new economic policy established in 1959 was the firm. The firm was to become the instrument of expansion, since its



inherent desire for growth and for profits would supply it with the means of technical innovation, up-to-date management techniques and a new commercial aggressiveness. And the key to realising this objective was the company concentration which alone could bring about higher productivity. The State had already, in the Fourth Republic, started the process of merger-led modernisation by implementing it in the coal mines and encouraging it in steel. With the signing of the Treaty of Rome the process accelerated; the average annual number of mergers rose from thirty-two in 1950–8 to seventy-four in 1969–75. Thereafter government policy openly favoured company concentration, and a decree of August 1967 introduced measures to speed them up. The result was a rapid increase in their numbers, which between 1966 and 1972 reached an annual average of 136.

All sectors of the economy were affected by a merger process that was seen as vital to business modernisation. In banking the Banque nationale pour le commerce et l'industrie (BNCI) merged in 1965 with the Comptoir d'escompte de Paris to form the nationalised Banque nationale de Paris. In investment banking the two major groups, Suez and Paribas, engaged in share control and investment strategies that turned them into key players in the French economy while the Crédit agricole, which possessed a special status, became one of the country's most powerful banking establishments. Yet it was obviously in industry that the merger process went furthest. International imperatives, the interests of business owners, and government policy combined to bring about the absorption of medium-sized firms by industrial giants, mergers between the latter, and the disappearance of smaller firms which were unable to compete. By 1970 the results, though varying from sector to sector, were clear. In 1971 three groups controlled 86 per cent of France's cement manufacture, and three international-sized giants – Péchiney-Ugine-Kuhlmann, Rhône-Poulenc and Saint-Gobain-Pont-à-Musson – dominated the chemicals industry. Four big manufacturers – Renault, Citroën, Peugeot and Simca – controlled automobile production. Less dynamic industrial sectors were equally affected: in textiles many small and backward firms disappeared, and in 1966 the State made it a condition of its support for a collapsing steel industry that the whole sector should be restructured around three firms – Wendel-Sidélcor, Denain-Nord-Est-Longwy and Creusot-Loire. The State was equally directive in imposing mergers on high technology industry as the price for its financial backing for research programmes. In the computer industry CII was created in 1967 and the nationalised aviation companies were brought together in the SNIAS.

Even the distribution sector was affected by the merger phenomenon, though here the State did not play the leading role that it did in industry. The emergence of super- and hyper-markets was actually the result of economic change and shifts in everyday lifestyles brought about by the



twin effects of rampant urbanisation and the growth of car ownership. In 1963 Marcel Fournier opened the first Carrefour hypermarket at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois in the rapidly expanding southern suburbs of Paris. Six years later there were 253 such hypermarkets in the Paris suburbs, and similar developments took place in the leisure and electrical goods sectors.

The rapid and spectacular modernisation of the French economy went hand in hand with an evolution in attitudes and behaviour. This was already noticeable in the Fourth Republic but became much more obvious in the expansionist years of the 1960s. Its most notable feature was the acceleration of investment where the average annual growth rate between 1960 and 1974 was 7.7 per cent – higher than that of production. Investment levels as a percentage of gross national product had averaged at just above 20 per cent in the 1950s, slightly less than the other leading industrialised countries. By 1969 they had reached 25 per cent, placing France in a leading position behind only Japan and Germany. We have already seen that the State sought to substitute private for public investment; it did so by reducing company taxation through a lowering of indirect taxes and by encouraging savings and private investment. 1960 saw the introduction of a system of depreciation allowances to encourage investment in new plants, and of new tax arrangements to benefit capital revenues (tax advantages on share income and on investment loans).

Business modernisation through increased investment was a determining element in economic growth – but it was also a consequence given that it resulted from an increase in company profitability between 1959 and 1972 (with a slight fall in 1962–3), and from an average annual rise in household income of more than 10 per cent between 1959 and 1973. The level of household savings as a percentage of disposable income rose between 1959 and 1969 from 14.6 to 16.6 per cent. Yet despite this increased savings level household expenditure rose between 1959 and 1973 at an average rate of 4.5 per cent and led to a rapid expansion in four key sectors – health, housing, transport and leisure. France's growth was thus to a very large extent the child of consumption. The profound consequences of this fact for social structure and social attitudes will be examined later. For the moment it is enough to say that it had considerable effects on France's economic landscape during the period of growth, and led to a great disjunction between those sectors affected by the explosion in consumption and those which were not.

### *The results of growth: the relative stagnation of agriculture*

There is a real paradox in the agricultural situation of the 1960s. On the surface, its progress was spectacular. Agricultural production virtually doubled between 1946 and 1974 despite the fact that the amount of farmed



land fell by 10 per cent and the farming population declined from seven million to three million. An equally significant indicator was the strong increase in farming exports due to the implementation of the EEC's agricultural policy: the balance between imports and exports rose from 29 per cent in 1959 to 104 per cent in 1973. The explanation of these outstanding results lies in the productivity gains made possible by an intensive effort of modernisation – mechanisation, fertilisers and animal feedstuff – that gave higher overall yields.

Yet this increase in production and productivity concealed a relative decline in the place of agriculture within the French economy. In the years of de Gaulle's Republic, agricultural production grew twice as slowly as that of industry or services. Whereas in 1946 agriculture represented 17 per cent of gross domestic product, by 1974 it produced only 5 per cent. The decline was due above all to the fact that household expenditure on food increased much more slowly than did that on industrial and service goods. There exists a structural limit on the consumption of food products which it is difficult to overcome save through an increase in exports, something that in turn requires the systematic reduction in production costs to enable agricultural goods to compete in world markets.

This flatness of internal demand at a time of increasing supply led to over-production and to a fall – or only a very modest increase – in agricultural prices. The consequence was that at a time when the incomes of other sectors were undergoing a sharp rise, agricultural incomes rose much more slowly or else stagnated.

It was a situation that seemed all the more intolerable given that many farmers had contracted large debts in order to modernise. Hence 1960–1 witnessed violent protest movements by the peasant farmers who constructed road barricades in 1960 and also, it will be recalled, pushed the members of parliament to call for a special parliamentary session, something which de Gaulle rejected. In 1961, when the artichoke market failed, demonstrations in Brittany led to the occupation of the sub-prefecture in Morlaix. The only solution appeared to be a flight from the land, and this was indeed what the evolution of the agricultural economy naturally produced. By 1975 the farming community constituted 10 per cent of France's active population – in 1946 the equivalent percentage had been 30.

Yet the disturbances within the agricultural sector meant that government could not passively sit by and let the rural exodus take its course. Starting in 1960, the State inaugurated a policy aimed at adapting agriculture to the world market: the goal was to transform the traditional family farm into a commercial operation run by a manager aware of the market and of the need for profitability. The policy had two main elements. The need to maintain farming incomes involved price support and the



organisation of the market. The principal objective, however, was to transform farming structures in order to create businesses that were large enough to be profitable through regrouping land and encouraging the retirement of older farmers. This was the purpose of the farming orientation law presented to parliament in 1960 by Michel Debré and which Edgard Pisani, who became Minister of Agriculture in 1961, put into practice via the adoption in 1962 and 1964 of the necessary texts. Pisani established SAFEK organisations (*sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural*) that had first claim on agricultural land coming onto the market and also an action fund to improve farming structures. Farmers were also encouraged to collaborate and to form co-operatives.

The policy was comprehensive and well adapted to the situation. Yet it provoked bitter resistance owing to the social dislocation that its objectives entailed, the weight of inherited customs and practices, and the difficulty the peasant farmers experienced in reconciling themselves to becoming henceforth a secondary, and in some senses marginal, group within French society. This resistance aggravated the difficulties encountered by the implementation from 1962 onwards of the common agricultural policy of the EEC and the subsequent loss of government control over the price of cereal and milk products – and also of import tariffs which were from now on fixed at Community level. A brutal awakening was to follow. In 1968 the Mansholt report (named after the president of the EEC commission) indicated that the number of farmers within the European Community should fall by 50 per cent over the following decade; in 1969 the report of the law professor Georges Vedel advocated a seven-million hectare reduction in the total area of cultivated land. By that date the modernisation of farming structures, though well advanced, had in no sense solved the problem. The number of farming units was declining at an annual rate of little more than 2 per cent, much less than the farming population. Yet it is clear overall that in agriculture, as in industry and distribution, a process of concentration was taking place. After 1962, moreover, legislation encouraged farmers to group together and favoured the creation of companies aimed at product conversion and commercialisation so that farmers would be protected from outside pressure. Such measures were far from negligible. The limited nature of their results nevertheless showed how difficult it to act effectively on existing social structures. Overall the peasant farmers appeared to be the victims of the age of growth.

### *The fruits of growth: industrial growth*

At the time of de Gaulle's return to power, France resembled, so far as industry's place in the international market was concerned, a developing country; it exported foodstuffs, primary manufactured goods (electricity,



glass, minerals, metal goods) and everyday consumption goods (textiles, clothing, leather goods). The Fifth and Sixth Plans placed the emphasis on capital and intermediary goods industries so as to reduce France's export gap in the more modern and technologically advanced sectors. At this level state intervention was frequently successful. Within the policy context already described, modernisation programmes occurred in the publicly owned industrial sector (oil, coal, aeronautics) and the reorganisation of key sectors of the French economy was encouraged. Thus the government signed a convention with the steel industry in 1966 and one with shipbuilding two years later. A 'computer plan' was established for the period 1968–71, and a space programme was set up in 1969–70. The aim was not simply to create competitive groups in the most advanced sectors like computers, aeronautics or space, but also to render viable, through mergers and take-overs, old-established industries like farming and food, engineering, electronics and chemicals. Such a wholesale policy of industrial restructuring necessitated the intervention of the big financial players who were alone capable of providing industry with the capital necessary for take-over and investment programmes. Thus the economic role of France's major financial groups was vital, and there was hardly a modernising industry that escaped the intervention of Rothschild, Empain Schneider, Suez or Paribas.

What were the results of this policy of industrial reconstruction in France, a policy that was carried out, in part at least, under the auspices of government?

Industry's share in the creation of gross domestic product had been roughly 20 per cent in the 1950s; by 1973 this had risen to 28.3 per cent (and 38.8 per cent if energy, farming and food are included). Higher productivity meant that the increased share of industrial production in gross domestic product was not matched by a similar increase in the percentage of the working population employed in industry – it rose from 39.07 per cent in 1962 to about 40 per cent in 1973. The process of industrial concentration, by contrast, led to major changes in the structure of industry. At a technical level there was a rapid decline in the number of firms employing between ten and twenty wage-earners, a consolidation of production in middle-sized operations, employing between 200 and 500 workers, and a more modest development of large-scale companies with more than 1,000 workers. The process was also economic in that there was in every sector a tendency for artisanal production to disappear (textiles, clothing, timber) and for concentration to occur around the leading companies in sectors where consolidation had already gone furthest (automobiles, shipbuilding, aeronautics, aluminium and armaments). Last, and most importantly, concentration was, as we have seen, financial, and took place under the direction of the major financehouses.



Table 7. *French energy consumption in per cent*

	1950	1960	1968	1973
Solid fuels	74	54	32	17.5
Oil	18	30	51	66.5
Gas	0.5	3.5	6	8.6
Other sources of electricity	7.5	12.5	11	7.4

The process was spectacular, especially so for a country which had traditionally seen itself as the home of small business. Yet it is important not to exaggerate its effects. The objective, which was to create large industrial groups of international size, was only partially achieved. In the early 1970s, 1,500 companies were responsible for nine-tenths of all French exports, and 45,000 small and medium-sized firms were totally excluded from the international market. Renault, the biggest French company, came no higher than twenty-second in the world league table, and France possessed really large firms in only a handful of sectors like automobiles (Renault, Peugeot, Citroën), oil (Compagnie française des pétroles, ELF-ERAP), glass (Saint-Gobain-Pont-à-Mousson and BSN-Gervais-Danone), aluminium (Pechiney-Ugine-Kuhlmann) and aeronautics. No French company was able, by contrast, to match the international giants in such sectors as iron and steel, chemicals, electronics, engineering or shipbuilding. However real and spectacular growth appeared at national level, it did not turn France into a country the majority of whose firms were able to meet and overcome international competition. And this situation was emphasised by the fact that the industrial expansion on which growth was based was directly linked to the consumption of a form of energy with which France was rather poorly supplied. French consumption of energy inevitably expanded between 1960 and 1973, rising from 85.6 million oil equivalent tons to 176.8 million. But throughout this period, coal was giving way to oil as the principal fuel source.

Given that the overwhelming percentage of the latter was imported, France's energy dependence increased from 41 per cent of its requirements in 1946 to 75 per cent in 1973. It is true that the cost of this energy was in real terms decreasing, since a therm produced from fuel oil was 60 per cent cheaper in 1970 than in 1958 and that the relative price of the fuel therm fell continuously compared with that produced by coal. Thus economic advantage won out over the inconvenience of energy dependency; and in any case the opening-up of frontiers and the acceptance of international competition made such a choice inevitable. In 1959 the 'Jeanneney Plan' drew the necessary consequences. Acknowledging the inevitability of the situation it advocated the closing of the most inefficient mines as a way of



increasing the productivity of the coal industry. Yet to counter what looked like the excessive influence over the oil market of the big overseas companies and the banks, the government promoted the creation of national companies whose purpose was energy research and the commercialising of oil (1960 saw the founding of the Union générale des pétroles). In 1965 the creation of the nationalised company ELF-ERAP provided the state with a more docile agent of its oil policy than the part private, part publicly owned Compagnie française des pétroles.

Throughout the period up to 1969, French growth thus took place in a context of industrial renovation and modernisation. If there is one sector to which de Gaulle's phrase that 'France has married her century' legitimately applies it does indeed appear to be that of industrial restructuring. There were, of course, as we shall see, limits to the process. But an undeniable effort of adaptation did take place, the effect of which was to make the France of the 1960s one of the most dynamic industrial countries in the world.

### *The major expansion of the tertiary sector*

Granted that the industrial activity which was directly responsible for economic growth was the most noteworthy economic feature of the 1960s, the most visible element was the extremely rapid expansion of the tertiary sector and the number of jobs that depended on it. There is nothing surprising in this – the growth of the service sector is a characteristic of developed societies and thus becomes a criterion of economic growth.

The tertiary sector employed 34 per cent of France's active population in 1946, and more than 50 per cent by the end of the 1970s. It was responsible for three-quarters of the new jobs created in the 1960s. The greatest expansion (+ 158 per cent) took place in the banking and insurance sectors, followed by telecommunications and administration, commerce and transport. The sector was responsible for 66 per cent of all female employment, particularly medical services, office work, commerce, teaching and the intellectual professions.

By the end of the 1960s, the tertiary sector was responsible for more than 50 per cent of overall national production. Productivity gains were less impressive than in the other sectors (at the end of the decade information technology was starting to improve the situation, but only in a very restricted number of branches and firms). Yet the service industries played a significant role in the overall balance of payments; the export contribution of services, plus revenues from tourism, totalled 20 per cent of the exports of goods.

But the expansion of the tertiary sector had its greatest effects on social structures and attitudes.



Through the pressure of economic growth and the accompanying international opening-up, the Gaullist decade was thus in every sense a period of spectacular change for France's economic structures. Public opinion and official propaganda ceased to laud the virtues of the small man and resorted instead to the new language of economic growth that spoke with an American accent. Production growth, profitability, investment, productivity and competitiveness became the key themes of the dominant discourse. And it was in the light of these new instruments of the age of growth that France became aware not only of the heady realities of economic dynamism, but also of the imbalances which the new age revealed in the internal harmony of the old national order.

*The limits to growth: regional imbalances*

Regional imbalances existed before the 1960s and before the post-war economic take-off. They had been clearly apparent in the 1930s and were condemned in 1947 in J. P. Gravier's book, *Paris et le désert français*. It was moreover the Mendès France and Edgar Faure governments of 1954–5 that took the first measures to help the most backward regions; and it was also in the 1950s that local initiatives began their attempt to heighten awareness of the problem and to encourage a collective community response. Yet it was undoubtedly the fact of growth which, by stimulating the national economy and increasing overall living standards, widened the gap between those regions that derived maximum benefit from the situation and those that, to an extent at least, did not.

There were three key elements in this regional imbalance. The first was demographic, and highlighted the differences between the regions situated on either side of a line stretching from Marseilles to Le Havre. To the west and south of this line – the West, the South West and the Massif Central – the demographic impetus was weak. Population increases were substantially below the national average in the Limousin and Auvergne, in Poitou-Charentes and Brittany. East and north of this line, by contrast, the population grew faster than the national average in the Ile-de-France, Rhône-Alpes, Provence and Côte d'Azur. These regions absorbed the bulk of the population increase that resulted from immigration or higher birth rates.

The second element relates to the accelerating urbanisation of the population. Whereas at the end of the Second Empire only 25 per cent of France's population lived in towns, the comparable percentage was now nudging 75. The increase was mainly concentrated in the large urban agglomerations, and in particular in the *métropoles d'équilibre* that were intended to counterbalance the weight of the capital: Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing, Nancy-Metz, Strasbourg, Lyons, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bor-



deaux, Nantes and Saint-Nazaire. The attempts made to limit growth in Paris and its region were successful to the extent that, whereas the population of the capital tended to decline, cities within a radius of 100–200 kilometres started to regain their vigour. But these attempts also led to the growth of dormitory suburbs, located ever further from the capital, and inadequately supplied with the jobs, public services and cultural resources that their growing population required. As well as creating its own problems, this accelerated urbanisation served to highlight the disfavoured position of other regions – the Centre, the South West (with the exception of greater Bordeaux) and the West (apart from the Nantes/Saint-Nazaire zone).

The third major characteristic of the regional imbalances was the depopulation of the rural zones that was the counterpart of rapid urbanisation and reached dramatic proportions in the 1960s as the exodus of young people led to a collapse of the rural birth rate and an overall population fall. The basic cause was a decline in agricultural employment, particularly steep in the East (Lorraine, Alsace, Franche-Comté), the South East (Provence, Rhône, Alpes), Normandy and Brittany.

Awareness of these imbalances led to efforts to correct them, in which regional initiatives were supplemented by government action. 1963 saw the creation, under Olivier Guichard, of the Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire (DATAR) whose task was to 'share out growth'. DATAR's basic strategy targeted the *métropoles d'équilibre* which were assigned the role of 'locomotives' for their region; capital equipment projects and 'structural investments' were devised with the intention of reviving zones whose existing economic base was wearing out. The objective was to remedy disequilibria by helping the economic reconversion of regions that either lacked industry (as in the West) or were suffering the consequences of the decline of traditional industries like iron, coal and textiles (Lorraine, Alsace, the North). But this policy came up against the hostility of local councils who resented the loss of their regional economic decision powers, the rivalry of established bureaucracies and, above all, the sheer difficulty of setting up a 'planned geography of development', namely a series of remedies for problems whose causes lay in geographical and economic constraints on which human efforts could have only limited effect.

Hence the action undertaken in this domain did much more to underline the regional imbalances that accompanied economic growth than it did to find a solution for them.

### *The limits to growth: the cancer of inflation*

Ever since 1944 France had experienced strong inflationary pressures, pressures that provided the context for, and in some respects the stimulus



to, national economic growth. Although inflation was a worldwide phenomenon, its effects were greater in France than in the majority of the leading industrial nations. Its fundamental causes lay in the well-known 'rigidities' of the national economy and in expectations that had emerged after the Liberation. Evidence for the first point lies in the key role of the trade unions in ensuring the stability of, or an increase in, living standards, and in the establishment in 1952 of a guaranteed minimum wage (the SMIG) which led to a form of wage indexation on prices; the second point is shown by the size of social security payments and by the belief that a constant increase in income forms part of the state's responsibilities. Alongside these structural explanations for the endemic nature of high inflation in France there also existed shorter-term factors. The basic aim of the Pinay-Rueff plan was both to attack these, and to eliminate a certain number of the structural causes of inflation, and it led to a real reduction in inflation levels in 1960-1. Yet this renewed stability was achieved at the expense of wage-earners and growth levels. The purchasing power and working hours of the former were reduced, and investment stagnated to such an extent that production per head of population rose by only 1.5 per cent in 1959.

Even so, such austerity medicine could not be swallowed for long. By 1961, industry's labour requirements led to a new rise in wage levels, despite a letter from the prime minister, Michel Debré, to the leaders of French industry urging them to limit pay increases to 4 per cent. This purely economic explanation was complemented by the effects of the agricultural orientation law of 1960, which caused a substantial increase in public expenditure and a rise in farm prices, and also by the rise in company costs that accompanied increased taxation and social security charges. (The latter resulted from an expansion in social security and public sector activities greater than the growth in gross national product.) But the fundamental cause of the re-emergence of inflation in 1961-2/was undoubtedly the pressure of demand for capital - and consumption - goods resulting from the return of 700,000 French people from Algeria. To this should be added the fact that the particularly crowded electoral calendar of autumn 1962 led to a softening of wage austerity that was bound to have inflationary consequences. In October, the prime minister, Georges Pompidou, raised the minimum wage by 2 per cent more than the rate of inflation, and the following month he increased wages in the public sector. In December, the decision of the Renault car company to give its workers a fourth week of paid holidays led to a series of similar demands elsewhere in industry. Early in 1963 de Gaulle, urged on by his advisers Jacques Rueff and Jean-Maxime Lévêque and by the Elysée secretary general Etienne Burin des Rozières, summoned the government to take energetic measures to put an end to the inflationary pressures and to restore budgetary equilibrium.

The result was the 'Stabilisation Plan', drawn up by the Minister of



Finances and the Economy, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. This was presented in September 1963 and finalised the following November, after de Gaulle had let Pompidou know that he regarded the measures adopted as insufficiently rigorous and the intended results as inadequate. Apart from the price freeze imposed from 31 August 1963 and replaced after a few weeks by strict controls, the Stabilisation Plan was strongly liberal in approach and favoured a return to natural market mechanisms. To put an end to 'overheating', the plan proposed both a severe credit squeeze and the reduction of important duties on selected industrial products to open up the French economy to the pressure of foreign competition. A series of additional measures in November brought government finances, and also credits for building and capital projects, under control. This deflationary policy was further accentuated by the political economy of the Fifth Plan, drawn up in 1963–4, which targeted, alongside its major objective of industrialisation, continuing wage moderation. The Stabilisation Plan and its prolongation in the Fifth Plan had undeniable results: from 1964 onwards inflation levels fell, and until 1968, the average annual price rise never exceeded 3 per cent. But by the same token the general economic deceleration produced by the Stabilisation Plan discouraged private investment levels: growth slowed down and there was real stagnation between 1964 and 1966. In a country that had come to appreciate the delights of growth, the stagnation resulted in a growling sense of discontent.

Inflation had thus been overcome – but by methods which dealt with its consequences without providing remedies for its deep-seated causes. In a letter to his prime minister (dated 30 October 1963) analysing the initial results of the Stabilisation Plan, de Gaulle noted: 'It is clear that the fundamental and permanent causes of inflation have not been brought under control.' The 1968 crisis revived an inflation that had been smouldering away under the Stabilisation Plan and would henceforth blaze until the 1980s.

What effects did inflation have on France's economy and society during de Gaulle's Republic? Inflation enabled the country to live in a climate of optimism where everyone could believe that their money income (but also their outgoings) would be larger tomorrow than they were today, and that the most important thing was not to be left behind in the wage race. This led to such social phenomena as wage claims, and to such linked economic phenomena as anticipatory purchases (buy something today before you need it because tomorrow it will cost more) and anticipatory price rises (since everything is going up in price you might as well raise your prices before being forced to do so by increased costs of transport and raw materials). Within France inflation had the advantage of reducing the cost of debt, and it thus encouraged borrowing for purchase which in turn



stimulated growth. It also, thanks to the abundance of money, encouraged the 'feel good' factor. Hence inflation helped French growth by enabling the State and industrialists to finance cheaply the debts they had incurred in order to invest, and by benefiting all those who borrowed to purchase houses, cars or electrical goods.

Yet the short-term benefits of inflation (which explain why in the Fourth Republic, but also between 1958 and 1974, governments allowed it to carry on) were more than counterbalanced by its disadvantages. The latter were initially visible in France's overseas trade. By raising the cost of French products, inflation made exporting more difficult, and by the same token favoured imports which came to seem relatively inexpensive. To remedy the consequent balance of payments deficit, the government was then obliged to devalue the franc; this occurred no fewer than eight times between 1944 and 1958. De Gaulle managed – though with great difficulty – to maintain the value of the franc until 1969, but after his departure his successors were forced, on 1 August 1969, to proceed to a further devaluation.

Within France, the victims of inflation were those who paid for economic modernisation, and for the profits of its beneficiaries, through reduced incomes. Such victims included people on fixed incomes or those owning government stock; those who held savings accounts or fixed interest bonds; urban and rural property owners who lived off fixed rents or the income from long-term leases; and those wage-earners whose pay did not keep up with price rises.

Inflation was thus responsible for a weakening of the international competitiveness of the French economy and for domestic social tensions. It provided a basis for growth – but the base was unstable and, to a degree, illusory. Despite the Stabilisation Plan, it remained a sword of Damocles hanging over France's expansion throughout the period of de Gaulle's Republic.

*The limits to growth: the resistance of the old ways.*

For all the stress that has been laid on it, the modernisation of the French economy in its period of growth must not be exaggerated. Industrial concentration, the policy of creating large, and profitable, agricultural holdings, and the establishment of supermarkets did not mean that the Fifth Republic possessed a magic wand with which it could eliminate France's traditional economic structures. Their disappearance was made all the more difficult by the fact that the 'small man' (for so long the distinguishing feature of France's social economy but now apparently condemned to disappear) continued to represent the greater number; and in a democracy, numbers are power.

For it is clear that the France of growth continued to be strongly affected



by the size of its small businesses. Small businesses dominated all sectors of activity. In 1970, only 130,000 out of a total of some 1,500,000 agricultural units were larger than 50 hectares. The 1,200,000 retail outlets were divided up among no fewer than one million companies. The same applied even in industry where, out of the 617,000 firms operating in 1971, more than 540,000 employed under 10 workers, and 58,000 between 10 and 50. While it is true that there is no necessary correlation between the total number of firms and their economic importance, it is clear that the role of small businesses was important and that they did not all belong to declining sectors.

At the end of the 1960s, small farms covered 63 per cent of agricultural land, and their low productivity made them the category probably most vulnerable to economic change. Their rapid decline demonstrated that France was losing the rural character which had continued to exist until the 1960s, and that henceforth only specialisation could enable a limited number of small farms to survive.

In retailing, small firms were still responsible in 1970 for two-thirds of food – and three-quarters of other – sales. They were, of course, a very varied group. If market share declined together with the number of retail outlets, this occurred mainly among the traditional shops that existed in rural areas affected by a massive population exodus. The core of the decline in retailing came from the traditional small shopkeeper – and it was their numbers who provided the bulk of the forces of CID-UNATI, the shopkeeper and artisan protest movement led by Gérard Nicoud at the end of the 1960s, that took up the standard abandoned ten years earlier by Poujadism. By contrast, a dynamic and profitable small retail trade continued to exist in specialised sectors like pharmacy, sports goods, perfumery and leather goods.

To a considerable extent, the same situation applied in industry. The artisanal sector continued to employ some 2 million workers in the early 1970s. If artisanal firms subjected to the direct competition of large companies (glass, chemicals, metals, textiles) disappeared fairly quickly, businesses linked to the food industry (butchers, *charcutiers*, bakers) held up well, and there was even an increase in small companies whose size suited them to activities like transport, building and public works. Thus artisanal business showed an overall numerical stability, albeit one that concealed the replacement of some sectors by others. Above the artisanal sector existed the world of small and medium-sized companies, employing between 10 and 500 workers. This sector, which accounted for over 40 per cent of the industrial work-force, was severely tested by the industrial modernisation of the 1960s: firms employing between ten and nineteen workers fell from 34.93 per cent of the total number in 1962 to 22.7 per cent in 1972. But here again the disappearance of companies unsuited to the new market conditions was counterbalanced by the many other small and



Table 8. *Ranking order of the nine major Western exporting nations in 1965 and exports as a percentage of gross domestic product*

	Exports in \$millions	Exports as % of GDP	World rank
USA	27,062	3.9	1
West Germany	17,855	15.9	2
UK	13,214	13.4	3
France	10,051	10.8	4
Japan	8,462	10.1	5
Canada	8,107	16.9	6
Italy	7,181	12.7	7
Holland	6,393	33.8	8
Belgium-Luxembourg economic union	6,382	37.5	9

medium-sized firms which were flexible enough to survive, either by becoming sub-contractors for large firms or by specialising in well-organised sectors where their dynamism enabled them to remain competitive. The overall position is clear. While growth undoubtedly resulted in industrial concentration, it did not lead to the disappearance of the 'small' and 'medium' firms which had traditionally dominated France's production capability. What growth did do was to deliver the final blow to archaic business structures and provide the stimulus to that modernisation without which an economy cannot survive.

Table 9. *Overseas trade balances, 1959 and 1972, in millions of francs*

	1959	1972
Agriculture	-2,166	+5,951
Agriculture and food industries	-1,116	-496
Energy	-4,185	-14,890
Intermediary industries	+1,948	-2,702
Machinery	+5,680	+10,808
Consumer industries	+2,402	-540
Transport and telecommunications	+3,016	+8,173
Building and public works	+274	+1,045
Services	+300	+1,545
Commerce	+207	+81
Total	+6,360	+8,975



*The limits to growth: the fragility of overseas trade*

We have noted the fundamental importance to French growth of the opening-up of the economy, and in particular the creation of the Common Market. In 1965, France became the world's fourth largest exporting nation, and its exports represented 10 per cent of its gross national product.

In the years that followed overseas trade increased, but showed a persistent fragility for a country that aimed to become a major industrial power. Trade figures for agricultural and food products improved; the 1962 deficit turned into a clear surplus ten years later. But the energy deficit worsened and the place of semi-manufactured goods in overall exports declined. The trade balance in manufactured goods also deteriorated as imports increased more rapidly than exports. The only sector to show a clear surplus was machinery and transport materials.

Overall, the extent to which exports covered imports tended to deteriorate and threatened to fall below the equilibrium level of 95 per cent (except from 1959–62 and again, thanks to the Stabilisation Plan, in 1965). The major problem was that, for all its modernisation effort, France suffered from an overseas trade deficit caused by an insufficiently broad export base; and this demonstrated that modernisation had not gone far enough compared with its major industrial rivals. One can understand why, from 1958 to 1974, the two presidencies of Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou regarded industrialisation as an absolute priority if France wished to retain its international status.

Over and above the profusion of political events that marked the history of de Gaulle's Republic in such a spectacular manner, the period was one of profound changes in France's economy. The country abandoned once and for all its nineteenth-century characteristics – a fearful protectionism, the preponderance of the rural, and the cult of small business. Instead, it opened itself up to international competition, accepted the constraints of industrialisation and industrial concentration, and made modernisation the key to its success. This transformation obviously took place within the international context of the huge growth of the industrial nations during the 'thirty glorious years', and to this extent France did no more than adapt to trends that extended beyond its frontiers. Yet it is equally true that the government was fully aware of what was at stake, and that it used the considerable resources it possessed to steer the economy in a direction that it regarded as essential. Thus the broad outlines of economic policy were well adapted to the implementation of balanced and healthy growth. In acting as it did, the Fifth Republic essentially followed the structural choices made by the Fourth, and it was more successful than its predecessor in overcoming the inflationary tensions that risked compromising the



outcome. Though it would be inaccurate to talk of a break with the preceding period, it is clear that the years 1958–69 did constitute a decisive moment in France's entry into the age of economic growth.

Such major change did not, for all its innovatory richness, put an end to the rigidities of the past. These latter put an important brake on the achievement of the goals of industrialisation and modernisation to which de Gaulle's Republic was committed. They included the regional imbalances that produced unequal growth levels across the country; the inflationary pressures whose illusory short-term benefits threatened France's international economic results; the fragility of overseas trade which showed that the country did not yet have the resources to match its new ambitions; and the continued existence of a small-business sector that had difficulty in adapting to the new rules of the economic game. What all this shows is that the golden age of French growth was also a time of profound social change, the importance of which can fairly be said to constitute a revolution in the conditions of life. It was a revolution that would not be without its tensions – or its troubles.



## The birth of a consumer society

### *Economic growth and demographic expansion*

France's 'thirty glorious years' were characterised not only by economic growth, but also by continuous population increase which continued that of the immediate post-war period and contrasted with the demographic stagnation of the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1962 and 1969, the population rose from 47 million to over 50 million. Thus the economic growth of the 1960s took place within the context of an expanding domestic market.

The demographic expansion was essentially due to two factors – a substantial natural increase in the population, and a surplus of immigrants over emigrants.

The natural increase was due to the persistence of a high birth rate, continuing the movement begun in the last years of the Second World War and testifying to higher fertility rates. Between 1960 and 1974, France had on average 850,000 births per year. The birth rate (which had been 15 per cent in the decade 1935–45) rose to 18 per cent in 1958 before falling back to 17 per cent at the end of the 1960s. This substantial increase went together with a significant decline in the mortality rate, which fell from about 16 per cent before the war to under 11 per cent in the 1960s. There was thus an annual natural increase in the population of roughly 300,000. Moreover, the reduction in the death rate increased individual life expectancy: whereas before the war the latter had been an average of

Table 10. *Annual French population growth 1962–1969, in thousands*

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Overall immigrant growth	860	215	185	110	125	92	100	150
Natural growth	291	311	358	322	335	297	282	269

*Source:* J.-L. Monneron and A. Rowley, *L'Histoire du peuple français*, Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1986, VI, p. 120.



Table 11. *Number of immigrants in thousands*

	1946	1954	1962	1968
Naturalised	853	1,068	1,284	1,320
Foreigners	1,744	1,765	2,169	2,621
Italians	451	508	645	586
Spanish	302	289	431	618
Portuguese	22	20	50	303
Polish	423	269	177	131
Belgians	155	107	78	67

fifty-six years for men and sixty-two for women, the comparable figures for 1965 were sixty-eight and seventy-five. Thus to the natural increase due to a surplus of births over deaths should be added the additional factor of greater life expectancy.

The second factor in demographic growth was the sizeable annual surplus of immigrants over emigrants. The surplus, whose annual average had been 155,000 between 1955 and 1960, soared in 1962–3 due to the repatriations from Algeria, and then stabilised at an annual figure slightly under 100,000 after 1965. These high immigration figures, which reflect the structure of the working population (a point to which we shall return), also revealed geographical changes. Until 1959, the largest number of immigrants came from Italy. But with the coming of the 'economic miracle' they were overtaken from 1960 by Spaniards who were themselves outstripped by Portuguese from 1960–1. There was a parallel increase in the number of immigrants arriving from North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) as well as from black Africa. Thus a total of nearly 4 million immigrants (some of whom had been naturalised) had settled in France since 1946; they constituted roughly a third of the population growth experienced after the war.

### *Changing demographic patterns*

The twin phenomena of more births and a declining death rate had very significant consequences for the age structure of the population and led to

Table 12. *Evolution of age distribution as percentage of the population*

	1954	1962	1968	1973
Under 20	30.7	33.1	33.8	32.5
20–64	57.8	55.1	53.6	54.4
65 plus	11.5	11.8	12.6	13.3



Table 13. *Total active population in thousands*

1954	19,603
1962	19,830
1968	20,664
1972	21,664

three developments: shortages in the working population for most of the period of de Gaulle's Republic; the quantitative and qualitative importance of youth in post-war French society; and the emergence of the phenomenon of the 'third age'. From a strictly demographic viewpoint there was nothing new – or unusual – about such developments. What was new was that in the 1960s they took place in a society experiencing rapid economic growth, a fact which gives a special significance to their behavioural and attitudinal consequences.

The first consequence of the new demographic structure was the relative smallness of the active population before 1965, the moment when the new generations of the post-war years arrived at adulthood. For though the active population was slowly increasing, the increase was smaller than that of the total population – the former rose by 12 per cent between 1946 and 1972, the latter by 28 per cent.

The reasons for the slow growth of the working population lie in the societal changes in the 1960s: on the one hand the raising of the school leaving age and the inevitable consequences of education, on the other the lowering of the retirement age and the overall ageing of the population (to which should be added the reduction in the farming population where female labour was proportionally very high). In a period when economic growth demanded a large work-force, this explains the need to recruit immigrant labour.

We have already noted education as one of the reasons for the shortages in the labour market. And it is clear that the 'education explosion' was an important feature of the 1960s: the expansion of the numbers in education was much greater than that of the population as a whole. This meant that in addition to the expanding numbers reaching school age there was also an increased demand for education. The result of such greatly expanded demand was a better educated population; the annual number of those passing the baccalaureate rose from 32,362 in 1949–50 to 52,287 in 1959–60 and to 139,541 in 1969–70. There was an equally large, though less rapid, increase in the number of technical qualifications awarded, with the numbers rising from about 94,000 in 1950 to 180,000 in 1970. This 'education explosion', which was due at least as much to changing habits as to population increase, caught governments unawares; and they were



Table 14. *Numbers in secondary and higher education*

	1949–50	1959–60	1969–70
Number of pupils in public-sector secondary schools	437,267	794,506	2,168,500
Number of university students	136,744	202,062	615,300

*Source:* F. Braudel and E. Labrousse, eds., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, IV, Presses universitaires de France, 1982, p. 997.

forced to respond hastily by the massive recruitment of teachers, many of whom were trained 'on the job', and by the construction of often improvised buildings. Simultaneously, the inadequacy of the traditional structures of secondary and higher education became clear; they had been created for the training of a small élite, and now found themselves confronted with the influx of larger numbers which they were incapable of organising in proper conditions and of educating in accordance with the new needs of society. The time was ripe for educational change, and the 1960s saw the beginning of a period of school and university reform.

Crucial though it was, the problem of young people's education was not the only one to arise from the changes in demographic structure. More difficult to measure in statistical terms was the appearance at the end of the Algerian war of a new phenomenon, the emergence of the 'baby boom' generation as an autonomous grouping within society. It would obviously be absurd to claim that no precedent existed for young people seeking to be different from their elders and wanting to proclaim their identity by ostentatious and provocative non-conformism. But in the 1960s these traditional characteristics were accentuated and coloured in a new way by France's changed socio-economic structures, and by the fact that young people became the privileged target of business groups who saw the cultural innovations they embodied and the commercial possibilities they presented. Youth thus found itself directly appealed to – and in some respects conditioned – by the resources of mass communication offering it means of expression specially tailored to a generation which enjoyed relative material prosperity, rejected the traditional values on which society was still based and sought, as a result, to affirm its originality *vis-à-vis* parents and grandparents from whom they were separated by the gulf dividing those born in the France of growth from those who had known the time of shortages. For this new generation the trans-frontier radio station, Europe 1, launched the programme *Salut les copains* whose success was so great that its producer, Daniel Filipacchi, founded a magazine with the same name in July 1962. In summer 1963 he brought 150,000 young



people to the Place de la Nation to applaud the new singing 'idols' created by his programme: Johnny Hallyday, Sylvie Vartan, Richard Anthony, and others. A whole youth culture developed around, and in imitation of, these idols – new musical forms (rock, pop, *yéyé*) aggressively non-conformist clothes (jeans and then the miniskirt), and role models who acquired the status of legends (it was in 1964 that the overwhelming success began of the British groups the Beatles and the Rolling Stones). Within the general context of the 'consumer society' that was emerging in France, the 1960s thus witnessed, via the phenomenon of the emergence of youth as an autonomous social group, a major transformation resulting from the demographic turning-point of the post-war years.

The transformation that took place at the other end of the age pyramid, though less spectacular, was none the less important in its consequences. Longer life expectancy combined with the desire in France for earlier retirement to create new patterns of social behaviour among the over-sixties. The percentage of men aged between sixty and sixty-four who were still at work was 71 in 1962; thirteen years later, in 1975, it had fallen to 54. In the same period the percentage of men between sixty-five and sixty-nine who were still at work fell from 42 to 19. This phenomenon can be explained by the desire to enjoy life in retirement before ill health prevented it. People thus became aware that the end of work did not mean the end of all activity and that a 'third age' existed in which men and women had plenty of time for their leisure, a fact that opened up new consumer possibilities.

Overall, demographic transformations – whose origins dated from the immediate post-war period but whose effects began to be felt only in the 1960s – had profound consequences on the structure of French society during its time of economic growth. They gave a hitherto unknown importance, relative to the working population, to the two distinct categories of youth and the 'third age'. An equally significant transformation was caused by the rapid urbanisation that France experienced during the economic expansion.

### *An urban explosion*

On the eve of the Second World War, and despite the fact that after 1931 a majority of the population lived in towns, it would still have been correct to describe France as a rural country. There were several reasons for this. The definition of towns (agglomerations of more than 2,000 inhabitants) included a multitude of settlements that were manifestly rural in character. Secondly, even the town dwellers of France had maintained close links with the countryside in which they had been born, for example through family members who had remained there, and many of them dreamed of



Table 15. *Spatial distribution of the French population*

	Urban population	Rural population
1946	53.2	46.8
1954	56.0	44.0
1962	61.6	38.4
1968	66.2	33.8
1974	72.2	27.8

returning home in their retirement. And thirdly, the dominant system of social values and mentalities was profoundly impregnated by the idea (which the effects of the First World War had reinforced) that France was in essence a rural country composed of small landowners working a land that gave them independence and liberty.

The years of growth were to blow this image to smithereens, so that by the end of the 1960s the average Frenchman had become a city dweller who was henceforth divorced from the land and whose social integration required the rejection of the old rural values and the adoption of new norms of profitability and mass production leading to mass consumption. This transformation is initially evident in the statistics: whereas in 1946 slightly more than half the French population lived in agglomerations of more than 2,000 inhabitants, by 1974 nearly three-quarters did.

The qualitative evidence shows that urbanisation was actually more spectacular than that revealed by the statistics. For urban expansion took place mainly in the large centres with more than 100,000 inhabitants and subsequently, after 1968, in towns of between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. The growth of Paris, by contrast, was limited by deliberate government policy, and the large villages and semi-rural small towns were hit by the desertion of the rural regions.

Yet this rapid urbanisation of the population came up against some fundamental obstacles: the near-total absence of an overall urbanisation strategy on the one hand and, on the other, the lack of house-building between the wars and during and after the Second World War. With the massive return of the European settlers from Algeria, an already serious crisis of urban housing became catastrophic – the more so in that it came at a time when new demands on housing were about to be made by the baby boom generation. As a result the government decided to launch a massive house-building programme to cope with the urgency of the situation. Between 1962 and 1969, an average of 500,000 housing units were constructed each year. But it was impossible to create this mushroom housing in the old cities with their narrow streets, their widely differentiated



– and often decaying – neighbourhoods, and their frequently chaotic traffic conditions (caused by the new phenomenon of the automobile which often could neither move nor park).

Hence an attempt was made to satisfy the growing demand for urban housing. Between 1954 and 1975, the space occupied by urban agglomerations doubled from 7 to 14 per cent of the national territory. At first, suburban growth took place in anarchic fashion, and housing was thrown up without the simultaneous construction of a proper road system or the necessary public facilities. It was then decided to replace this uncontrolled urbanisation with a planned programme linked to the regional development policy. And so the early 1960s saw the growth of the housing estates, the prototype of which was Sarcelles in the Paris region. This time public facilities were provided at the same time as housing; and the result was the creation of autonomous, self-contained urban centres. In 1965, the adoption of an overall plan for the Paris region led to the proposal to create 'new towns' (five around Paris, followed by four in the provinces) in which cultural and economic activity would avoid recreating the dormitory suburbs which the housing estates had become. Evry and Cergy-Pontoise were the first examples of this third generation of urbanisation through suburbia.

The policy of planned and comprehensive urbanisation turned out to be a failure. At a quantitative level it succeeded in solving the housing problem by making available to the French a stock of apartments that enjoyed modern standards of comfort. But it also created its own problems. The absence, or at least rarity, of employment in the suburbs, where most of the new housing was concentrated, forced their inhabitants to make long daily journeys to the city centres, producing in turn endless traffic queues in the morning and evening. The desire to construct housing quickly and cheaply led to the use of poor-quality materials that resulted in the residents enduring noisy conditions and inadequately completed accommodation. The rigorously functional and drably unimaginative architecture produced a sense of monotony, if not actually the sense of living in a concentration camp; and the separation of residential areas from commercial centres prohibited the creation of a lively street society which gives city life its charm and is a basic feature of sociability. Thus the urbanisation process engendered in those French people forced to inhabit such hastily created suburbs a new malaise, sometimes referred to as 'sarcellititis': the boredom and depression created by these soulless cities where concrete was king and where material comfort could not overcome the sense of living in an artificial universe created outside the 'real city' for those who profited least from growth. The nostalgia for rural life revealed by opinion polls at the end of the 1960s (three-quarters of the French dreamed of living there) showed the extent of the failure of an overhasty and improvised process of urbanisation.

The shift from a still semi-rural France to one that was strongly



urbanised, particularly when accomplished in less than ideal conditions, inevitably produced a sense of psychological disarray for those compelled to endure such a major change. And this disarray was all the greater for being accompanied by a veritable revolution in the relative importance of different socio-professional categories – in the jobs that the French people had.

*A revolution in socio-professional structures*

Under the impact of economic growth and its consequences, the years of de Gaulle's Republic saw spectacular changes in France's social structure, changes which profoundly modified its overall physiognomy and had repercussions on collective patterns of behaviour and attitude. To put it at its most basic, France ceased to be a country of independent small employers because of the dramatic fall in the number of working farmers and of shopkeepers and industrialists. Yet she did not, as a result, turn into the kind of society predicted by Marxist analysis in which a small number of capitalist owners of hyperconcentrated companies face a proletarianised working class in rapid expansion thanks to its absorption of an expropriated independent middle class. The total number of workers, though remaining very substantial, stagnated as a percentage of the active population between 1962 and 1965. Between a working class and a bourgeoisie that were both undergoing profound changes there emerged a heterogeneous collection of intermediary groups, known (for convenience' sake) as the salaried middle class and comprising rapidly expanding numbers of senior managers and members of the liberal professions, middle managers and employees. Whereas the small employer in industry, commerce and agriculture had been the typical Frenchman in the first third of the twentieth century, the executive (*cadre*) took over this position in the period of France's growth, thereby becoming the victor of the societal competition that was taking place.

This new structure of French society destabilised the traditional vision of a country in which three opposing, though unequally sized, groups – bourgeoisie, peasant farmers, working class – existed. It was not that this vision lost all its relevance, but rather that it became fossilised by the growth of intermediary groups, of those 'middle classes' that came to prominence in 1960s France. This is not the place to enter into the disputes of different sociological chapels, where each sect employs its own hypothesis to determine the best analytic approach, using theoretically derived concepts, to the complex social reality of France in her age of growth (on this see M. Parodi, *L'Economie et la société française depuis 1945*, pp. 205–7). Nevertheless it is important to describe this changing social reality; and so we shall acknowledge the 'middle classes' as a separate



Table 16. *Evolution of socio-professional categories as a percentage of the active population*

Socio-professional category	1954	1962	1968	1975
Working farmers	20.7	15.8	12.0	7.7
Agricultural workers	6.0	4.3	2.9	1.8
Employers in industry and commerce	12.0	10.6	9.6	8.7
Higher executives and liberal professions	2.9	4.0	4.9	6.9
Middle executives	5.8	7.8	9.9	13.8
Employees	10.8	12.5	14.8	16.6
Workers	33.8	36.7	37.7	37.0
Servants	5.3	5.4	5.7	6.1
Other categories	2.7	2.9	2.6	1.4

category since many French people viewed them in that way, even though this does not fit in easily with the traditional – but perhaps outdated – vision of society.

*The losers: peasant farmers and small employers*

If one social category can be said to have paid the price of the period of economic growth, it was without question the peasant farmers. The statistics speak for themselves: whereas in 1954 these farmers still constituted 26.7 per cent of France's active population, by 1975 they formed under 10 per cent. Their malaise was particularly noticeable in the early 1960s through the vast public demonstrations of 1960–1: road blocks, pressure on the parliamentarians, the storming of the Morlaix sub-prefecture. The disappearance of a huge number of farmers was all the more significant in that it affected a social category that had identified itself with national values throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we saw in the last chapter, this numerical decline in the farming population was the result both of economic changes and of the action of the Debré and Pompidou governments under the stimulus of Edgard Pisani.

The policy, long advocated by the Centre national des jeunes agriculteurs under Michel Debatisse, consisted of adapting French agriculture to market realities through the creation of profitable farms, using the most modern techniques and machinery in order to deliver competitive products. To render it effective such a strategy required the creation of larger farming units (and thus a large reduction in the number of farmers) and substantial investments. The implementation of the policy led to the departure of a huge number of farmworkers (the traditional 'farm servants'), of elderly farmers and of those whose units were too small. The



result was that between 1963 and 1970 the number of farm units fell from 1.9 million to 1.6 million. Did such a massive 'slimming down' of agriculture enable those peasant farmers who remained to acquire a social status that would give them parity with other socio-professional categories? The answer is necessarily ambiguous. Farm incomes rose considerably between 1965 and 1970, and in crude terms, were above those of workers, employees and middle cadres. But the use to which such income was put differed considerably from those of the aforementioned groups. An important part was devoted to investment in land, buildings, machinery and livestock, thus enabling the peasant farmers to acquire a patrimony incomparably greater than that of most other socio-professional groups. By contrast, the share of income devoted to consumption was roughly 20 per cent below the national average. The peasant farmers were bottom of the consumption figures, be it for household goods, leisure or education. The result was that, in a society where behaviour was dominated by the propensity to purchase consumption goods, the peasant farmer became a marginal figure.

It is true that this overall situation of a peasantry defeated by growth needs to be modified by the diversity of conditions experienced by farmers in the 1960s. Leaving aside those who had only a small amount of land and were incapable of borrowing to invest, there were two major categories in the French countryside. Both practised modern agriculture and possessed efficient, highly mechanised plants, through which they sought to obtain high productivity yields. They differed, however, in the size of their available capital, and, by the same token, in the profits they were able to realise and in their resulting lifestyle. The capitalist farmer of the great plains of the Paris Basin was a company director; the scale of his investments guaranteed high productivity, and he knew how to benefit from the implementation of the EEC's common agricultural policy. Thus his farm brought him high profits and a high standard of living. Things were different for those farmers who had to go into debt to purchase land or machinery and whose interest payments limited the profits they could derive from their labour. Granted that they were able to enjoy the new standards of urban society with regard to housing and the education of their children, the share of their immediate income that they were able to devote to such expenditure was strictly limited. Hence the maintenance of adequate price levels was, for them, a matter of survival, and it was in order to put pressure on Brussels (which fixed price levels) and on government (which negotiated them) that they adhered *en masse* to the FNSEA, whose frontline troops they became.

Alongside a farming peasantry which, while not disappearing, has become today a minority category in France's working population, the other great victim claimed by growth was small business. In 1900, the small



businessman had been, together with the small and medium-sized farmer, the core element of that independent middle class which formed the social cement of France from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s. He was now condemned by the realities of the economic situation to an equally ineluctable decline. Running companies that were incapable of adapting to the new forms of production and distribution, many small businessmen were obliged to give up after 1954 – when the last of the post-war shortages came to an end and they had to confront normal market conditions. Between 1954 and 1975 their share in the active population fell from 12 to 8.7 per cent, a decline that affected industrialists as well as shopkeepers (who fell from 1,253,000 to 913,000) and artisans (down from 757,000 to 534,000). Even these figures conceal the gravity of the crisis, given that small business held on very well in the building, public works and transport sectors and that, as the last chapter showed, the specialised retail sector acquired permanent new outlets. Yet it was clear overall that this was an economically fragile sector that felt itself threatened. It was equally fearful of the action of the labour unions whose demands led to an increase in costs that threatened the survival of small businesses and of the big business groups who dominated the Centre national du patronat français. This explains why the small-business sector periodically exploded with anger in an attempt to resist changes that were leading to its disappearance. From 1944, small businesses came together in the Confédération générale des petites et moyennes entreprises, founded by Léon Gingembre, which broke away from the rest of the business community. In the 1950s, moreover, small businessmen formed the core of the Poujadist movement, just as in the late 1960s they were the prime movers of the aggressive protest movement of Gérard Nicoud and the CID-UNATI.

Hence the two most characteristic groups of the 'small man's France' which had triumphed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became the great losers of the age of growth. The working class, for its part, maintained its numerical position; one could speak of its permanence were it not for the fact that it too underwent profound changes.

### *Continuities and changes in the working class*

In overall statistical terms, workers remained the largest socio-professional group in France, forming a category that experienced a slow overall growth in numbers during the 1960s – under 7 million workers in 1958, 7,261,000 in 1968, and 7,989,000 in 1975. But given that this increase was smaller than that of other categories of wage-earners, it reflected the quasi-stagnation – admittedly at a high level – of their place in the active population: 36.7 per cent of the active population in 1962 (against 33.8 per cent in 1964), and 37.7 per cent in 1975. This statistical stability conceals



substantial internal changes which resulted in a veritable transformation of the working class. An increase in the number of the most highly qualified workers and foremen, the result of a growth in specialisation, was accompanied by a decline in the number of unqualified workers, particularly labourers, and by the stability of factory workers. This unqualified workforce (which still made up 57 per cent of the labour total at the end of the 1960s) contained a growing number of female and foreign workers – two categories which fulfilled the criteria of mobility that ordinary workers were increasingly expected to have.

Essential though these statistical observations are, they should not conceal another reality, which is the break-up of the working class into a series of sub-groupings, whose life and work conditions varied enormously. It is true that the French working class had never been homogeneous and that, as a consequence, the 'working class' had always been a cultural rather than an objective reality. In other words, the working class was defined more in relation to other social groups (bourgeoisie, peasant farmers) or by general characteristics (where it was also necessary to acknowledge important differences in work dependency, job security, and so on) rather than by an internal definition which would enable one to speak of a single 'workers' condition'. In this respect the multiplicity of groups and the diversity of conditions which each of them experienced was not a new fact but the consolidation of a long-standing reality under the impact of technological change and the upheavals produced by economic growth. There was an infinite variety of conditions and status differences separating the worker in a steady job, with tenure, from the wage-earner holding down a temporary position in one of the numerous short-term jobs made necessary by the mobility of new production processes; between the trained worker and the one who learned his job in a few hours' work; between the worker who profited from the numerous social benefits provided by the large companies which signed labour agreements and the employee of the small sub-contractor or service firm who enjoyed no guaranteed conditions; between the strongly organised and unionised workers in the public sector or the big public and private companies and the isolated worker. Thus the world of labour was a kaleidoscope of categories dominated by differences. Neither the objective conditions of labour nor its lifestyle entitle one to talk of the 'working class' as an homogeneous entity.

This increase in diversity was probably not the most important of the changes that affected the working class. Economic growth had profound consequences on patterns of life, work, mentalities and even consciousness amongst workers. Thus one can observe, alongside the increase in the executive, foreman and undermanager categories, the ever-growing importance in industry of the intellectual work carried out by white-collar



workers: technicians, production technicians, industrial designers, consultants and programme analysts. This was the 'new working class' whose existence was discovered in 1963 by the sociologists Serge Mallet and Pierre Belleville (S. Mallet, *La Nouvelle Classe ouvrière*, Paris, Seuil, 1963; P. Belleville, *Une Nouvelle Classe ouvrière*, Paris, Julliard, 1963). They observed that under the impact of the increase in overall living standards, these workers shared in the consumption patterns characteristic of France in the age of growth, and that the explosive urbanisation of the 1960s had put an end to the housing segregation of the nineteenth century which had played an important part in the creation of a class consciousness amongst the workers. It is therefore possible to talk of an authentic 'integration' of this 'new working class' which was expanding in size compared with the traditional categories of workers. As a result, the frontiers that separated the working class from the rest of society were weakening.

Does it therefore follow (as much of the population, according to the opinion polls, believed) that growth was leading to an 'embourgeoisement' of the working class? Or was it rather the case that, as many sociologists claimed, the working class was expanding through the absorption of employees, minor civil servants, artisans and so on? This was the thesis of Serge Mallet who saw in the cadres and technicians, categories that he assimilated into the working class, the emergence of a new working-class élite bearing a new and modernising ideology based on qualitative demands (the workers' status in the firm) rather than the traditional quantitative demands for higher wages. Without entering into the detail of these issues of definition, let us simply observe that the 1960s saw the coexistence, within an extraordinarily divided and diversified working class, of the traditional working population (which remained the most numerous but tended to stagnate or to decline) and a new class of industrial wage-earners, far removed from the classic vision of the industrial worker and much more integrated into French society in the age of growth. It would clearly be wrong to use the word 'embourgeoisement' to describe the former group when one recalls the forty-eight-hour week worked by 53 per cent of them, the nervous tension and exhaustion caused by mechanisation and its 'infernal rhythms', and the continuing differences between a working-class consumption that remained overwhelmingly dominated by food and housing, and the expenditure of the average member of the population. Yet the thesis is unquestionably valid for the 'new working class'; and consumer aspirations existed in all categories of the working class. The result was a decline in that 'class consciousness' which had given the working class its specificity, given that the latter's aspirations no longer differed significantly from those of the other categories of the population. The desire to overthrow bourgeois society, once the cement of revolutionary thought, became a theme for speeches rather than a political objective



now that the workers' principal desire was for fuller participation in the consumer benefits which it offered. By contrast, the theme of a new organisation of society to enable a more equitable distribution of the 'fruits' of growth found an undeniable echo in the community of wage-earners.

*The trade union movement: strength and crisis*

Such major changes and the diversification of the working class were bound to affect the trade union movement and its forms of action. The evolution in working-class attitudes and the desire of the great majority of wage-earners to share in the benefits of growth led over time to a more contractual definition of social relationships and to an attempt to establish institutional procedures for regulating labour conflicts to avoid the devastating economic effects of prolonged strikes. The evidence for this is widespread: the 'wage conference' of 1963 and the establishment in 1967 of the National Employment Agency in which unions and employers' organisations came together under the supervision of the state; the 1966 law strengthening the powers of workplace committees; the Toutée Report of 1964 proposing wage increases in line with company results in the nationalised sector (progress contracts); and the creation in the same year of incomes commissions chaired by R. Gregoire to solve the problem of public-sector wages. Yet these attempts came up against two fundamental obstacles. The first was the opposition of (most) French employers to state intervention in industrial relations; profoundly attached to the credo of liberalism they were deeply suspicious of any attempt to institutionalise labour conflicts which they sought to resolve at company level without any external pressure that might weaken managerial freedom. The second was the fear of the major trade union organisations that they risked integration into the state via institutionalised procedures for resolving social conflicts. This anxiety originated in part in the old French syndicalist tradition of fear of losing independence to the politicians (be it the state or the parties) but it derived also from the outbidding tactics of the major trade unions, who feared losing their influence if they could be successfully accused by their rivals of practising class collaboration.

Although Force ouvrière, which originated in the 1947 scission of the anti-communist minority of the CGT, openly proclaimed its reformism and welcomed the beginnings of an evolution that it regarded as corresponding to its conception of social conflict in a modern state, the same was not true of the two most powerful trade unions, the CGT and the CFDT. Descended from France's first trade union organisation (founded at the beginning of the century), the CGT fell after the Liberation under the control of the Communist Party to which its leaders Benoît Frachon (general secretary until 1967 and then president) and Georges Séguy



(general secretary from 1967) belonged. The CGT claimed between 1.5 and 2 million members and was the majority union in most workplace elections, despite a slow decline in the 1960s. It saw itself as a revolutionary and Marxist organisation, and thus rejected all forms of normalising social relations in favour of massive strike action which would begin in a given industrial sector, mobilise the majority of the labour force affected, and gain public support so that in the end the authority of government was weakened.

This remained the model for the great miners' strike of 1963. The strike started on 1 March after the French Coal Authority refused to agree to the 11 per cent wage demand submitted by the CGT, the CFTC and Force ouvrière, and was fed by the malaise of an industry that knew itself to be condemned by changing patterns of energy consumption and by the proposals in the 1960 Jeanneney Plan for the closure of unprofitable pits. De Gaulle's maladroit decision on 2 March to requisition the mineworkers transformed the strike into a trial of strength between government and miners. The miners refused to accept call-up, and the government's determination to break the unions by relying on the unpopularity of a strike that would diminish coal reserves at the end of the winter led to a hardening of the conflict and to the collapse of Pompidou's November 1962 promises of a 'social year'. A whole series of events made the government realise that the affair had been badly thought out: the vast solidarity movement in support of the miners which developed spontaneously and which the CGT attempted to control; the establishment of inter-union committees on the ground; the social unrest which spread across the public sector with stoppages by the Lacq gas workers and by the personnel of the SNCF, the RATP, Air France and EDF-GDF – and also the entry into the conflict on the miners' side of the Church hierarchy. Having gambled on the strike movement running out of steam, the prime minister decided that it was imperative to find a solution to a conflict which was damaging the authority of the state. Sheltering behind the conclusions of a 'wise men's committee' chaired by Pierre Massé, the government pushed the Coal Authority to yield all along the line, conceding the 11 per cent pay increase, a fourth week of paid holidays (as in the nationalised Renault car works) and the opening of negotiations on the industry's future. But the strike was actually the swansong of traditional patterns of working-class struggle. It had no effect on the decline of the mining industry, and its principal consequence lay in the emergence of new patterns of conflict resolution, something that was itself characteristic of the changes of the early 1960s. The Massé Report, which was actually drawn up by Jacques Delors in collaboration with the miners' union, took the form of a contract and advocated an incomes policy based on the existing economic situation.

The miners' strike revealed the considerable importance of the second



labour organisation, the Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens, whose role in the Lorraine mining areas, which it dominated, was fundamental. Backed by its 600,000–800,000 members and the 20 per cent of the vote that it generally obtained in plant elections, the confederation, which was founded on the social doctrine of the Catholic church, had undergone significant development since the Liberation. An activist minority, known as 'Reconstruction' and based on the teaching union the Syndicat général de l'éducation nationale (SGE), advocated the 'deconfessionalisation' of the CFTC in favour of a revolutionary strategy that would enable the flowering of the individual within worker committees organised at the base. At the November 1964 conference of the CFTC, the 'Reconstruction' group realised its ambition: the majority of the delegates decided on the secularisation of the union, thereafter known as the Confédération française et démocratique du travail, and elected Eugène Descamps as general secretary. The new union henceforth preached a revolutionary strategy founded on the creation within firms of 'worker power', a new form of the class struggle. It preferred action from below to centrally organised campaigns, and sought also to incorporate into its theory the new forms of production and the phenomenon of consumerism. The dangers of the latter were denounced, and stress was laid on the importance of qualitative demands. Such modernism meant that the CFDT became the trade union most in tune with the concerns of the 'new working class'. Despite the considerable differences in analysis between it and the CGT, the two unions signed a united action pact in January 1966 that demanded improved purchasing power and living and working conditions for its workers, the protection and strengthening of union rights in the workplace, an increase in public-sector investment, employment guarantees, the reorganising of the tax system, and the rejection of the Toutée–Gregoire contractual procedures. Yet a sizeable minority of the CFTC membership (80,000–100,000) refused to accept the changes and decided to maintain both the Christian base and the title of the union. Alongside the GCT, FO and CFDT, the CFTC (miners and employee unions and the Alsace-Lorraine federations) thus formed a fourth labour federation to which the government granted rights of representation.

This multiplication of labour confederations, like the diversity in structure of labour organisation, was actually evidence not of the dynamism of the labour movement, but of its inability to incorporate the astonishing social changes of the 1960s into its conceptual maps and action strategies. These new realities could not be properly integrated into the conceptual frameworks and slogans of the traditional syndicalism which formed the basis of the unions' thought and action. The result was that the working class became increasingly incapable of definition. The trade unions were unable to mobilise more than a small proportion of its membership, and did



not succeed in formulating either the strategies or the perspectives which would have enabled them to articulate aspirations that were in any case frequently contradictory (because of the coexistence of different generations of working class) and confused. The explosion of May 1968 was to demonstrate this disarray and the failure of the organisational structures of a rapidly changing working class.

### *The ruling class*

It is far from easy to determine what is meant by the notion of a 'ruling class'. Marxists see it as meaning the bourgeoisie or finance capitalism. More recent developments have led to a broader and more flexible usage in which the term refers to the category of key 'deciders', those who are able – whatever their field of activity – to exercise, via their decisions, a major influence on the life of the nation. This definition results in a ruling class of some 100,000 people (see M. Parodi, *L'Economie et la société française depuis 1945*, p. 221, and J. L. Monneron and A. Rowley, *Les 25 ans qui ont transformé la France*, p. 163).

This category includes the controllers of the major financial, industrial and commercial institutions, together with those members of the liberal professions close to business (notaries, stockbrokers, business lawyers, business consultants, big estate agents, and so on). To these should be added senior civil servants, those holding political power, sections of the intelligentsia – and also the 30,000 major land owners who between them possessed a significant part of the national territory.

It is clear that this ruling class underwent important transformations during the 1960s under the impact of economic and social change and the evolution of the apparatus of the state. In the category of economic deciders, the phenomenon which attracted most attention was the replacement of the 'family employer' (the 'great bourgeois dynasties' like Boussac, Wendel and Schneider) by a new employer class, in which financial groups ran their empire through 'salaried managers', technocrat-employers who owed their promotion not to the possession of financial capital, but to their professional competence. Examples include Roger Martin who took over the Saint-Gobain group or Ambroise Roux who became president of the CGE (Compagnie générale d'électricité). The extent of the change should not, of course, be exaggerated. Family-based capitalism did not disappear, and some old-established families continued to exist – for example Michelin, Wendel, Béghin and Say. But to do so they had to adapt to the new rules by contracting alliances with financial groups and recruiting managers. Finance capital continued to operate through its control of boards of directors, but the latter had now to take account of the business strategies devised by the managers whom they had appointed. The



'managers', for their part, generally came from within the ruling classes, even when they did not themselves own the company's shares, and were rarely the self-made men they portrayed themselves to be. Yet despite these reservations, the changes in decision structures were real, and there can be no doubting the significance of this modification in the recruitment procedures to the commanding heights of the economy.

What is true is that these transformations had an unequal impact on French business since, as we have seen, the mutations of the period meant that traditional companies existed alongside a minority of new firms capable of responding to the new economic criteria. Out of the 60,000 companies that featured in the 1975 census, no more than 1,000 can be classified as modern. This diversity was evident in the major employers' organisation, refounded in 1946 as the Centre national du patronat français (CNPFF). The CNPFF was actually a liaison committee between the numerous employers' federations and unions, and its two presidents, Georges Villiers (until 1966) and Paul Huvelin, were wholly incapable of arbitrating successfully between the conflicting interests of the large, powerful, export-led firms which dominated the employers' organisation, and the mass of small and medium-sized firms that were protectionist by instinct and expected the CNPFF to help them by putting pressure on the state while being individually too weak to influence its decisions. The paralysis of the CNPFF led it to adopt an openly conservative attitude towards the state, whose interventionism it feared; it asserted with intransigence liberal positions in defence of the employers' authority in the firm, and refused to contemplate an overall economic policy with its possible social implications. This spirit was notably present in the 'charter' which the CNPFF adopted on 19 January 1965 and which insisted on the need to preserve the 'employer's function'.

Although the employers formed the core sector of the ruling class, discussion of the latter should not underestimate the importance within it of the political personnel and of the senior civil service, whose significance resides precisely in their role as decision-takers. Here again the period of de Gaulle's Republic witnessed a basic transformation. Pierre Birnbaum's researches have shown that whereas in the Third and Fourth Republics the political and administrative spheres had been separate, the Fifth Republic saw their coming together in the 'civil servants' Republic' (P. Birnbaum, *Les Sommets de l'Etat. Essai sur l'élite du pouvoir en France*; see also C. Debbasch, *L'Administration au Pouvoir*, Calmann-Levy, 1969). By the end of the 1960s, almost a third of government ministers came from the higher civil service (as against 12 per cent in the Fourth Republic). Here again, as in the sphere of the economy, the competence revealed by the acquisition of a top-quality degree seemed a much better way to enter the ruling class than the lengthy apprenticeship required of professional poli-



ticians. Virtually 50 per cent of government ministers had successfully navigated the qualifying examinations for entry into grammar school or higher education teaching, or for admission to the Ecole Nationale d'Administration or the Ecole Polytechnique.

The question then arises of whether this similarity in the transformation of access paths to the ruling groups within the state can be extended to include a permeability between economic deciders on the one hand, and political/administrative deciders on the other. If movement from positions of economic decision-taking to their equivalent in administration and politics was relatively uncommon, the reverse was fairly widespread. Pierre Birnbaum has calculated that more than half (54 per cent) of the ministers who quit active politics joined the board of directors of a company, either in the private or the public sector. In this respect the existence of a large public sector constituted an important staging-post for the osmosis between the economic and the politico-administrative decision-takers. One can also detect in de Gaulle's Republic a growing number of senior civil and military officials who moved over into the private economic sector. The percentage of those who left government service rose from 21 in 1964 to 28 in 1975. They went principally into the sectors which required high levels of economic and technical competence (banking, chemicals, metallurgy and electrics).

It is therefore possible to speak of a ruling group created out of the interpenetration of economic, administrative and political deciders. What were its defining characteristics? In comparison with the élite groups of the Third and Fourth Republics, its distinctive characteristic was, as we have seen, functional competence. This explains why people talked of the birth of a 'meritocracy' founded on the possession of a degree obtained after advanced study. Though a wide variety of such degrees existed, they had a common structure: possession of the baccalaureate in a selective stream (preferably mathematics-based); a period spent preparing for the so-called great schools (*grandes écoles*) in the élite *lycées* in Paris or the provinces, or in the Paris-based Institute d'études politiques (which remained known in popular parlance as 'Sciences Po', after the former Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques, despite its nationalisation in 1945); and then entry into one of the *grandes écoles*, the Polytechnique (for training engineers), ENA (for top civil servants), HEC or ESSEC (business schools), or more specialised, yet equally prestigious, institutions like the Ecole des Mines, the Ecole Centrale or Supélec.

Would it therefore be true to say that the Fifth Republic realised the old ideal to which the Third Republic had aspired but which it had never managed to achieve – that of replacing an élite based on wealth or birth with one founded on competence or merit? The work of sociologists like P. Bourdieu and J.-C. Passeron (*Les Héritiers, les étudiants et la culture*,



Editions de Minuit, 1964) indicates that what was taking place was a process of juxtaposition rather than substitution. It seems that one cannot really talk of social promotion or of 'new men'. The situation is rather one of the children of the traditional ruling class passing through the new meritocratic channels and thus acquiring, alongside the advantages of birth and wealth, the new assets of competence. It was the cultural heritage they had acquired from their families that gave them the lion's share in the new forms of social power. Hence the changes which French society as a whole experienced in the period of growth were paralleled, so far as the ruling class was concerned, by a simple adaptation to the new conditions.

It is thus tempting to talk of an effective closing-off of this ruling class at its most elevated level, a closing-off which blocked the possibilities for advancement that had been partially opened by the changes in its recruitment mechanisms. Yet contemporaries saw things differently, and believed that society had become relatively fluid thanks to the mass emergence of a social group – the salaried middle classes – which appeared to demonstrate the possibilities of social mobility.

### *The golden age of the salaried middle class*

The notion of the middle class is viewed by both economists and sociologists with much suspicion. It is markedly absent from the Marxist social analysis which profoundly affected post-1945 visions of French society. Hence most analysts sought to situate such groups in pre-existing categories, either by linking them to the bourgeoisie (the cadres) or making them annexes of the working class (the employees). Yet analysis of the socio-professional categories identified by the INSEE shows that the majority of the French population belonged to groups which could not be reduced to the traditional classes without resorting to speculative – and often specious – reasoning. It is thus more sensible to abandon the questions of definition and to start with the reality that the middle class, at least as a category of social description, represented.

We have already seen that the independent middle class, primarily represented by the working farmers and the small businessmen and industrialists who between them formed the social base of the Third Republic, had come under considerable pressure as a result of the economic changes brought about by growth. Taken as a whole they formed no more than 15 per cent of France's active population in 1975 (as against 37 per cent in 1931). The essential social fact of the years of growth was, in contrast, the veritable explosion of the salaried middle class. In 1975 the total number of wage-earners (including the workers) formed 82 per cent of France's active population. By subtracting the 37.7 per cent of workers, one arrives at a figure of more than 44 per cent of the active popu-



lation who were, in the broadest sense, members of the salaried middle class.

This was obviously an extremely heterogeneous group and one formed of categories with widely differing incomes, stretching from employees and service personnel via the salaried staff of the public sector to engineers and senior managers. There was no uniformity in the tasks its members performed or in their place in the production process. To this internal diversity must be added the vagueness of the frontiers separating them from the bourgeoisie (should the senior, salaried manager of a large company be placed in the bourgeoisie or the middle class?) and the working class (where to place a technician or an employee?). It is difficult not to conclude that, defined in this way, the problem is actually a false one reflecting the desire to impose a classification designed for the industrial society of the nineteenth century on the completely new society that was emerging out of the economic growth of the second half of the twentieth century.

The originality and homogeneity of the salaried middle class lie elsewhere than in the position of its members in the production process, its income levels or the type of tasks its members performed. They reside rather in distinctive characteristics which were already valid as definitions of the independent middle class in the early twentieth century, and which can be observed in the behaviour patterns of members of the salaried middle class. The first of these was the sense of belonging to an intermediary stratum between the working class and the bourgeoisie and to be engaged in a process of social advancement which would, with luck, take it from the former to the latter. The second was a lifestyle modelled on that of the bourgeoisie and, in the 1960s, defined by energetic participation in consumption and the acquisition of the forms of consumer goods that gave concrete demonstration of social advancement: the possession of comfortable housing – and perhaps even of a second home – ownership of a motorcar, or household electrical goods and of a television. Third, and last, came the acute awareness of the fragility of their social status and the consequent fear of any economic difficulty or social policy that would threaten jobs or incomes and lifestyles. The result was that this salaried middle class, while breaking with the old stress on individualism which had been so important to the independent middle class, was resistant to the classical forms of trade union action practised by the big labour confederations. The managers' union, the *Confédération générale des cadres* (CGC), originating in the engineers' associations and run in the 1960s by André Malterre, appeared too élitist to the majority of the middle class. Relatively few of them joined a union, and those that did so tended to go for the labour confederations (CGT, CFDT, FO, CFTC) which created special unions to attract them; yet even here they were resistant to the forms of action that were practised, something which added to the difficulties experienced by the unions.



Within this community of the salaried middle class, the category of 'higher managers' that formed its apex and bordered on the bourgeoisie acquired an emblematic status. It became the archetype, the model to imitate, the group that had succeeded in deriving the maximum benefit from the possibilities of social advancement offered by the France of growth. With his uniform of well-cut suit and briefcase, his high salary which enabled him to buy all the consumer goods he wanted, his sports car and his brand label of being 'young and dynamic', the higher manager came to symbolise the France of the 1960s – the pursuit of happiness through consumption. For the majority of the salaried middle class such conditions were obviously far from achieved; but the ambition to achieve them came to condition their life aspirations and to structure their behaviour. For them also consumption became the yardstick by which social status was measured.

#### *Improving living standards and the explosion of consumption*

Between the end of the war and 1975, a substantial increase occurred in per capita real income. In real terms, it rose by about 50 per cent during the years of de Gaulle's Republic. Though very unequally distributed (a point to which we shall return), this massive increase in French living standards had consequences for the conditions of daily life that can properly be called revolutionary. In the early 1960s, the French began to experience an improvement in material progress that was greater and quicker than anything they had known before in their history. Within a decade, the spectacular growth in purchasing power enabled them to buy the goods and services which had hitherto been the preserve of the privileged groups in society. A study of the evolution of salaries (which affected, be it recalled, more than 80 per cent of the active population) shows the extent of this spectacular transformation.

The consequence was that in the 1960s the principal preoccupation of the French became their access to all forms of consumption. And one can speak in this respect of a veritable revolution which radically modified society's conditions of existence and represented the impact on daily life of economic growth.

The initial consequence of this transformation was the very marked decline of the importance of food and clothing in domestic budgets. Whereas ensuring their 'daily bread' had been for centuries the major preoccupation of the majority of the population, food now ceased to be, for most French people, an obsessive anxiety. It was not only much more available – as the increase in the consumption of luxury foods like meat, vegetables and fruit in even the most modest social groups testifies – it also became much cheaper. The same remark applies, with some reservations and



Table 17. *Index of evolution of salaries, 1955–1970*

	1955	1960	1967	1970
Minimum wage	100	130	171	276
Workers' weekly wage	100	160	256	353
Employees' monthly wage	100	157	262	250
Technicians' and supervisors' monthly wage	100	160	256	336
Higher executives' monthly wage	100	169	290	376
Civil service salaries	100	150	237	310

*Source:* CERC, cited in A. Prost, 'Le Temps de la prospérité', *L'Histoire*, 'Les Années de Gaulle', 102 (July–August 1987).

delays, to clothing. Hence the core elements in budgets for economic survival evaporated, leaving the largest part of income available for expenditure which had hitherto been secondary or else classified as superfluous. Housing and consumer durables fall into this category. The building mania of the 1960s referred to above was largely financed through savings by the French who increasingly came to own their apartments; by 1975, about 20 per cent of French incomes were devoted to the purchase of a flat or an individual house. The same growth can be seen in the percentage of expenditure devoted to equipping homes with refrigerators (90 per cent of French homes possessed one in 1975), washing machines (75 per cent in 1975). Television became a virtually indispensable part of the living room in most homes.

Further tangible evidence of the change in lifestyles came with the expansion in car ownership, an expansion which originated not merely in the desire to escape, but in the more prosaic fact of the proliferation of suburbs that were badly served by public transport and the separation of workplace and home. Yet the lengthening of the holiday period is certainly

Table 18. *Share of different types of expenditure in French domestic budgets as a percentage of total expenditure*

Type of Expenditure	1959	1975
Food	37.7	24.9
Clothing	12.0	10.1
Housing	16.4	20.3
Hygiene and health	9.5	14.0
Transport and telecommunications	7.6	11.5
Culture, leisure, relaxation	6.9	9.9
Hotels, restaurants, cafés, various	9.9	9.3



a factor in the development of car ownership; after 1956, when the three-week holiday was established, there was a gradual increase until 1963 and the four-week vacation. By 1973, 70 per cent of French families possessed a car, with very little variation between socio-professional classes.

With the automobile and the travel that it enabled, we move to the more sophisticated patterns of consumption that growth made possible. There was for example, a veritable explosion in expenditure on hygiene and health, whose consequence was a longer lifespan. By the same token expenditure on culture and leisure grew by 50 per cent under de Gaulle. Holidays – the most obvious sign of the desire to escape made necessary by the increased effort demanded in these years of growth – became general, at least for town dwellers. In 1958, 31 per cent of the French went on holiday; by 1973 the percentage had doubled to 62. There immediately developed a large leisure and holidays industry, whose most symbolic evidence was the huge success of the Club Méditerranée. The Club managed to achieve the double feat of satisfying the French people's desire for consumption while at the same time offering it a release from the revulsion felt for the standardised and commercial nature of the society which that same consumerism had created. Second homes (15 per cent of the French owned one at the end of the 1960s) and weekends were also part of this model of leisure consumerism. Yet in this case they were more an ideal to be realised than a widespread reality, given that they continued to be the reserve of the upper social strata – the business bourgeoisie, senior managers and members of the liberal professions.

Though philosophers, sociologists and writers might deplore this civilisation of 'things' where possessions took priority over the self and where matter triumphed over spirit (in 1965 Georges Perec's novel *Les Choses* gained the Prix Renaudot), there can be little doubt that the mass of French people benefited from the birth of the consumer society in terms of a higher living standard and greater comfort. Yet were they satisfied? The answer has to be no. Opinion polls taken between 1959 and 1969 show that the French did not regard the 1960s as a period of overall improvement in their lives, and seem rather to have been more sensitive to the upheavals in their daily lives caused by growth, and to the inequalities in the sharing-out of prosperity, than to the individual gains they had made. It is certain that France's overall entry into the age of mass consumption went hand in hand with the continuing existence of pockets of poverty and with incontestable evidence of inequalities.

### *'Continuing social inequalities'*

The relative standardisation of living conditions around the model furnished by the managers in the 1960s should not mislead us. Though



national income per head increased by 50 per cent (rising in constant francs from an index of 100 in 1960 to 155 in 1970) and provided clear evidence of an overall increase in living standards, the latter did not – in any sense – reduce social inequalities. France remained a country of rich and poor.

It is not easy to define these two groups precisely. In the case of the rich, an INSEE study showed that in 1970, 1 per cent of the French declared to the tax authorities an income of more than 100,000 francs. Within this group can be identified 8,000 households (0.04 per cent of the total) whose income exceeded 400,000 francs. These would appear to be the really well off in France. But the evaluation of incomes is probably inadequate, since only those salary incomes that are declared by a third party are trustworthy – the other sources of income being systematically underestimated. To achieve complete information on the wealth of the French, it is necessary to add the ownership of assets – property, shares, jewellery, gold, paintings, savings, and so on. Such detail considerably modifies the information derived from income data since it shows that 5 per cent of French (2.5 million people) owned 45 per cent of the national wealth.

At the other extreme of the social hierarchy were the truly poor, those for whom the basic needs of food, clothing and housing remained the constant problem which it had ceased to be for the majority of the population. Given that no precise definition of poverty levels exists, we are reduced to trying to evaluate poverty by reference to the number of French whose income was equal to, or lower than, the minimum wage (known until 1969 as the SMIG). About 9–10 per cent of the population (5 million people) fell into this category: the elderly and sick, the long-term unemployed and immigrant workers, farmers and farmworkers, small shopkeepers and artisans.

Between these two categories of rich and poor there was a growing tendency for salary differentials to widen. Economic pressures led to high salaries becoming even higher for those with greatly sought-after qualifications, whereas the minimum wage increased only with difficulty and slowly, in response to the political will for social justice rather than the demands of the labour market. Using a 1955 index of 100 as a base, the salary of managers had risen to 376 in 1970 and the minimum wage to 276. These inequalities in growth were obviously the origin of the pay demand movements made by groups whose income was rising more slowly than that of others and who mainly belonged to sectors left behind by economic growth. We have already referred to the farmers' malaise and the demonstrations it produced in 1960–1, and to the great miners' strike of 1963. To these should be added the numerous strikes in the public and nationalised sectors which the government attempted to resolve by establishing procedures for monitoring salary changes (the Toutée procedures)



Table 19. *Index of inequalities in total household consumption*

Population	100
Working farmers	79
Agricultural workers	71
Non-farming self-employed	121
Higher cadres	172
Middle cadres	127
Employees	109
Workers	86

and bargaining structures (the Gregoire commissions). The fact remains that through the inequalities which it maintained or deepened, economic growth was the source of tension, and that the sharing-out of its 'fruits' caused much social conflict.

The government, however, did not remain passive in the face of such inequalities and sought to correct them. It practised a consistent policy for income redistribution whose purpose was to compensate for the natural effects of economic change. Through taxation or social security charges the state clawed back a growing proportion of the national income which it then redistributed, either through public services (crèches, hospitals, sports stadia, schools, libraries) or through transfer payments (social security payments, family allowances, pensions, study grants). Such 'transfer payments', which had formed 15.5 per cent of national income in 1960, exceeded 20 per cent by the end of the decade. This transfer operated from rich to poor, but also from single people to large families, from the healthy to the sick; it thus introduced a limited version of that permanent national solidarity which had been the inspiration of the 1945 introduction of Social Security. But to correct inequalities is not to eradicate them. Even though the disfavoured categories were the major beneficiaries of these social transfers, the latter in no sense put an end to the substantial inequalities referred to above.

The inequalities in consumption patterns can be seen by looking at the consumption index of the various socio-professional categories against a national mean of 100. Leaving aside the poorest sector, whose budget at the end of the decade continued to be dominated by expenditure on basics, we can see that for the rest of the population, inequalities existed across a limited number of spheres. Between the two extremes of the social scale the differences in food consumption were fairly limited, as they were in the purchase of consumer durables. 7.5 per cent of workers owned a car as against 93 per cent of higher managers, and possession of television or electrical goods was similar across the social categories, though they obviously required a greater financial effort for a modest budget. The



most significant variation concerned the most conspicuous forms of consumption, leisure and culture. By the end of the 1960s, more than 80 per cent of higher managers and liberal professions went on holiday, as against fewer than half of the workers. Attendance at museums, theatres and cultural centres was the preserve of the better off. And, most importantly, access to higher education, which opened the door to senior executive positions, remained very difficult for children from modest backgrounds, despite the efforts to democratise education. Herein lie the core questions of whether or not genuine social mobility actually existed in France, and whether the aspiration to upward social mobility, which is one of the characteristics of the middle class, could be realised.

### *Social mobility – or rigidity?*

Did growth bring about an increased social mobility in France between the late 1950s and the late 1960s? When posed in these terms, the answer to the question is undoubtedly yes. Economic change brought about an overall modification in the structures of the active population, with the disappearance of a large number of farms, shops and industrial and artisanal companies and the parallel growth in the number of employees and middle and senior executives. This meant that many of the children of farmers, shopkeepers and artisans abandoned the life which their parents had led in favour of jobs as employees and executives. Yet despite this fact, which is the simple consequence of the transformation of social structure, it remains the case that in 1970 92 per cent of male, and 84 per cent of female, farmers were the children of farmers, and that two in three workers' children also became workers. Employees came from employees' or workers' families and, at the other end of the social scale, 60 per cent of the sons of middle executives became middle or higher executives (30 per cent in each category) while 52 per cent of the sons of higher executives also became higher executives. What conclusions emerge from all this? The first is that differing interpretations are possible. One may conclude that the phenomenon of social reproduction is structural in origin, with most children entering the profession of their parents or one of similar social status, in which case the observed social mobility is the result above all of economic development and there is little change in the distance that separated the classes (this is the conclusion of C. Thélot, *Tel père, tel fils? Position sociale et origine familiale*). It can also be said that social advancement occurs over several generations and affects a minority of individuals. The fact that a third of employees', and 15 per cent of workers', children achieved the status of executive at the start of the 1960s shows that social advancement was not absent from the France of growth. Unequal access to the highest-status sectors of education, which had become the recruiting grounds for



the ruling class, did seem to put a brake on the chances of promotion to the highest spheres. In which case the 'blocked society' referred only to the commanding heights and not universally. But was this actually anything new in the history of French society?

However one may qualify the idea of a profound transformation in French society, the fact is, in itself, incontestable: the years of de Gaulle's Republic form a major turning-point which led to the disappearance of the last vestiges of rural France, of the 'small man's France' inherited from the nineteenth century, and its replacement by a new society of urban consumers whose driving force was consumerism. The effects of this upheaval can easily be seen in statistics, and reveal a major change in structures. But the consequences for mentalities, behaviour patterns and culture (which will be examined in the next volume in this series) were no less spectacular and merit detailed consideration. No less interesting is the relationship between this change in social structures and the realities of governmental authority. Government's only responsibility for the new French society lay in the economic growth which it had enabled to take place. Its real role lay elsewhere – as manager of the transformation, in the ways in which it enabled the country to navigate the major U-turn into a consumer society, aided the French to accept the structural changes, or provided compensation for the consequences of growth. A certain number of these responses have been analysed.

We shall see that the history of de Gaulle's Republic after 1962 came to be written in terms of the meeting between 50 million French people undergoing ten years of the greatest social upheaval in their history (but in the context of a substantial increase in their standard of living) and a political authority incarnated in the figure of General de Gaulle. It was to be written, moreover, in the context of the profound distance that existed between a French people whose principal concern was adapting to growth, with its joys and difficulties, and General de Gaulle's world-embracing vision. De Gaulle did not regard the business of politics as ascertaining whether one social group or another should receive a greater part of the national cake; for him politics was about ensuring that France should continue to enjoy the status that would enable her to play a full part in world affairs.



## The policy of grandeur: a world design?

It had been obvious since 1944 that General de Gaulle regarded the prime purpose of statecraft as enabling the state to count in world affairs and to have the means to defend itself in the ruthless struggle that nations wage against each other. To this priority everything else had to be subordinated. Hence the objective of economic growth was less to improve French living standards than to provide France with the sinews of power. De Gaulle's Christmas message of 1963 was in this respect abundantly clear: 'Our prosperity has reached hitherto unknown levels and our social progress has never before been so great. And as the dual achievements of expansion and reason give us power, so France recovers its status, its reputation, its assets.' There can thus be no doubt that de Gaulle's Republic was organised around its founder's vision of the international order and of the place that France should hold within it. Yet once this basic principle is acknowledged, the task remains of deciphering the real goal of the grandeur that de Gaulle intended to achieve. Was it, as most experts have claimed, to give France the resources to enable her to play a world role without coming under the tutelage of one or other of the superpowers? Or was the priority accorded to international questions, as Philip Cerny alleges, a deliberate deception whose real purpose was to cement French society, a symbol rather than an objective. 'The prime purpose of de Gaulle's foreign policy was not to increase France's power and prestige as such. The concept of *grandeur* was rather to create a new and deeper sense of national unity that would enable the traditional cleavages in French political life to be overcome by reinforcing the consensus around a strengthened and dynamic state that incarnated the general interest within a stable political system' (Cerny, *Une politique de grandeur*, p. 18).

### *The world according to de Gaulle*

To understand France's international actions in the 1960s it is necessary to provide a brief analysis of the conceptions of the world – and of France's role within it – held by the man who was the inspirer and architect of the foreign policy that bore his imprint.



At the heart of the Gaullist vision lay the primacy of the nation-state. For de Gaulle, only fantasies and fairytales existed outside this central reality, a reality that descended from history, was fashioned by achievements and hardships, and was cemented by national consciousness. The nation-state was incapable of rational definition (see 'a certain idea of France') and had interests that were determined by geopolitics and imposed by the need to survive. It was a categorical imperative that dominated all others, and the consequence was that everything had to be subordinated to the need to defend the national interest. It was thus vital that there should exist a political will to incarnate these superior interests and make them the basis of national policy. This vital role fell, of course, to the president of the Republic. The press conference of 9 September 1965 said it all.

Once a nation has been created – its fundamental geographical, ethnic, economic, social and moral dimensions laid down and its linkages established with foreign influences and ambitions – there exists a general interest which transcends internal diversities and forms a set of conditions that are vital to its action – and to its existence. The recognition of this fact consolidates its unity and it is the extent to which the State does, or does not, conform to it that determines whether its political actions succeed or fail. In a modern democracy centred on efficiency but also under threat, it is absolutely vital that the national will should be clearly expressed when its future is at stake. Such is, self-evidently, the rationale for our new institutional framework. (*Discours et messages*, IV, p. 388)

The concept of the primacy of the nation-state is fundamental. It explains de Gaulle's distrust of all constructions that sought to replace it, be they based on a supranationalism that he rejected or on an alliance system in which the freedom of manoeuvre of individual nations was restricted by a dominant partner. It also explains his vision of inter-nation relations. The latter operated on the basis of each nation's will to realise its own ambitions, in other words the strategies that would benefit its national interests. Thus France's attitude towards other nations must derive from the purest self-interest; and the strained relations that had existed between de Gaulle and the allies during the Second World War were there to warn against any possible temptation to yield to some form of idealistic internationalism or to substitute sentiment for geopolitical realities. In this respect de Gaulle stood solidly within the nationalist traditions of the French Right, even if he appealed on occasion to the new ideas which the French Revolution had given to the world (see, for example, his press conference of 31 January 1964). This concept of *realpolitik* also determined the contours of France's military policy. Memories of the 1930s and of the military collapse of 1940 combined to underpin the idea that the national interest required the possession of a strike force capable of intimidating the



adversary and of dissuading it from any aggressive intent. Given that national survival depended on such a military force, the latter was necessarily entrusted to the man who personified the nation's destiny. Its construction became a national priority.

There can be no doubt that de Gaulle had a vision of remarkable coherence, and that it was rooted in the recent experiences of the French people and in ideas which many of them shared deep down, even when (as often happened) they adhered to political and ideological positions that were in other respects very different. It is this which explains the fact that foreign policy was probably – as opinion polls consistently showed – the area in which de Gaulle's actions enjoyed their greatest support. To the monthly question 'are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the government's foreign policy?' 50 per cent declared themselves satisfied between June 1965 and December 1968, with an average of less than 20 per cent declaring themselves dissatisfied and about 30 per cent not replying (IFOP, *Les Français et de Gaulle*, pp. 260–1). In this respect the realisation of the consensus of which Cerny speaks was undoubtedly successful, though there is no evidence that this was actually de Gaulle's goal.

It is nevertheless the case that while de Gaulle's overall vision in 1958 was clear – and clearly understood – France was far from possessing the resources necessary to protect its interests in the international battleground. Bogged down in the Algerian crisis which had followed that of Indo-China, France seemed to international opinion to be guilty of an out-of-date colonialism. The dynamism of her economy was paralleled by an appalling financial position that limited her room for manoeuvre by placing her at the mercy of overseas creditors. Membership of NATO and military inferiority deprived her of the means with which an autonomous policy could be articulated. And even the freedom to make economic decisions was limited by the acceptance in March 1957 of the Treaty of Rome establishing the Common Market, something which the supporters of Europe saw as the first step towards reviving the principle of supranationalism. The consequence of this state of affairs was that the first requirement of the policy of grandeur lay in establishing the means to carry out international action – and this in turn meant liberating France from a colonial legacy that had become a millstone.

### *The end of empire*

Even after the loss of Indo-China, the French empire constituted a resource for the policy of grandeur since it made France a world power. But the resource risked becoming a handicap if new colonial conflicts of the sort that had occurred in Indo-China and were now taking place in Algeria were to arise to threaten national stability or place France in the dock of



international opinion. Faced with two strategies – that of maintaining the empire as a power resource or of winding it up as an obstacle to France's international freedom of manoeuvre – de Gaulle made the wholly pragmatic choice of the middle way. His choice derived from a ruthlessly clear analysis of the situation, in which the lessons of the Indo-China and Algerian wars had a decisive role: the desire of the colonised peoples for emancipation was henceforth an irreversible fact, and any attempt to oppose it would inevitably lead to an endless succession of colonial wars. What made this outcome even less tolerable was that the administrative, infrastructure, educational and welfare costs of the overseas territories were on an ever-rising curve. Algeria furnished the example of what de Gaulle, to virtually unanimous approval, was determined to prevent – the emergence of new Algerias in the African colonies that constituted the major part of France's empire in 1958. This is the sense of the first sentence of the chapter entitled 'Overseas' in the first volume of *Memoirs of Hope*. 'On my return to government I was determined to liberate France from the costs – costs which no longer had any corresponding benefits – imposed on it by the empire.'

Yet it was obvious that for de Gaulle withdrawal must not signify abandonment. The initial reason for this was that, as he himself stressed, his whole education had been dominated by the exaltation of the greatness of France's colonial achievement; the second was the realisation that the colonies provided France with a field of action and a means to power. How then was this expert in *realpolitik* to reconcile desires with reality? The answer lay in the magic word association which was to enable 'the peoples of overseas France to choose their own future while at the same time developing a direct co-operation between them and us'. What is interesting about the formula is that it mirrored the outcome that de Gaulle had planned for Algeria but that had been rendered inoperable by the joint efforts of the FLN and the French Algeria ultras. Unlike Algeria, moreover, there was in this instance a complete identity with the policy followed in the final years of the Fourth Republic. Since 1956, the Defferre framework law had laid down structures for the evolution of France's black African possessions which provided each territory with a form of internal autonomy: a territorial assembly elected by universal suffrage appointed a government council run by a vice-president, with the French governor, who held the title of president of the government council, remaining France's representative and head of public services. The reality was that the institution of this democratic parliamentarism and the character of the elected vice-presidents (Houphouët-Boigny in the Ivory Coast, the *abbé* Youlou in the Congo, Sékou Touré in Guinea) meant that the territories had in practice a special political status that manifestly could not for long be satisfied with the pretence of autonomy which they had been accorded.



The two principal African political movements, the RDA (the African Democratic Rally) run by Houphouët-Boigny from the Ivory Coast and the Party of African Unity (PRA) led by Leopold Senghor from Senegal, both vigorously demanded from 1957 onwards the 'right to independence' of the African territories – though this did not signify that they sought to exercise it immediately. Moreover, the fact that both parties sought to establish an association with France did not stop them from having different ideas as to the form it should take. Where Houphouët-Boigny and the RDA sought a federation, Senghor and the PRA wanted a confederation. De Gaulle responded to the two sides, having initially proposed a mere form of internal autonomy that provoked their violent opposition, with a daring compromise identical to that which he had attempted to apply to Algeria in 1959. It involved the assertion of the right to self-determination and the ensuing choice for each territory between association (the word was chosen in preference to federation or confederation) with the structures proposed for the Community, and secession. The referendum on self-determination took the same form as that used for the constitution on 28 September 1958 – acceptance or rejection *en bloc*. Any territory which rejected the proposed text was considered to have chosen to break all ties with France. Those that accepted it came under section 12 of the constitution which defined the status of the members of the Community and the institutions which regulated its affairs.

The states forming the Community enjoyed full autonomy; they administered themselves and democratically ran their own affairs. Yet the enumeration of 'Community competences' showed the importance of the sectors that lay outside the power of each territory. These included foreign and defence policy, the currency, economic and financial policy plus control of strategic primary materials, control of justice, higher education, transport and shared telecommunications. Special institutions were provided to run these Community sectors. The Community was endowed with a president, who was none other than the president of the French Republic and who had the role of head of the executive. He it was who summoned and chaired the executive council, composed of the Republic's prime minister, the heads of government of the member states and the ministers appointed by the Community for its common matters. He it was also who controlled the executive council's agenda, formulated and announced the relevant measures for the Community to handle, and supervised their implementation. Legislative authority was entrusted to a senate composed of delegates appointed by the parliaments of the member states in proportion to their population and to the Community responsibilities they held. (What this actually meant was shown by a decision of 9 February 1959 that gave 186 senators to the French Republic and a total of 98 to the twelve other members . . . ) And finally, possible conflicts between member states



would be resolved by a court of arbitration of seven judges to be appointed, according to a decree of December 1958, by the president of the Community.

The proposal, while clearly proclaiming the right to independence of the African states, equally obviously left France in effective political control, and was thus hardly likely to appeal to the leaders of the future Community. But de Gaulle made it brutally plain that the plan had to be taken – or left. He did so during the voyage he made to black Africa between 21 and 26 August in a series of speeches which mixed firmness with lyrical evocations of a future Franco-African community. In Fort Lamy, Tananarive, Brazzaville and Abidjan, where the leaders had chosen to accept the plan subject to its future evolution, the population gave de Gaulle an enthusiastic reception. In Guinea, by contrast, Sékou Touré delivered an anti-colonialist diatribe during which he declared his preference for 'poverty in liberty to wealth in slavery', and in Dakar noisy demonstrations revealed the divisions within the Senegalese population. On the surface the 28 September vote represented a triumph for de Gaulle. In the thirteen territories of black Africa and Madagascar the 'yes' vote easily won (7,471,000 votes) to 1,121,600 'noes', and in twelve of the thirteen the community received overwhelming support. Only Guinea rejected it, by 636,000 votes to 18,000. It was immediately declared to be outside the community, lost its rights to economic aid and to the support of the French administration, whose officials were required to leave within the space of two months. General de Gaulle did not deign to reply to a message from Sékou Touré requesting association with the Community in accordance with article 88 of the constitution. Guinea was henceforth to be an independent – but foreign – country.

The Community federalism created in September 1958 never really came into operation. Barely a year after the Community was founded, the leaders of Senegal (Leopold Senghor) and Sudan (Modibo Keita) announced their intention to establish the Republic of Mali. The latter came into being in Dakar on 17 January 1959, and in September its leaders demanded full independence, though without breaking away from the community. Urged on by Houphouët-Boigny, de Gaulle was inclined to refuse. But his advisers, and Michel Debré, managed to convince him that it was better to modify the Community, which was a real source of influence for France, than to destroy it. On 11 December 1959, at Saint Louis, the capital of Senegal, de Gaulle accepted the evolution of its members; four days later Philibert Tsiranana requested the independence of the Republic of Madagascar. The federal community established in September 1958 gave way to what Leopold Senghor described as a 'contractual Community'. Franco-Malian and then Franco-Madagascan agreements were signed, and it was thereafter impossible to refuse similar deals to the other states. Thus 1960



witnessed the conclusion of the transformation of the Community. Clause 2, article 86, of the constitution, which declared that 'a member state has the right to become independent and in so doing ceases to belong to the Community', was completed by the constitutional law of 4 June 1960, adding a third clause to the effect that 'a member state of the Community can also, by agreement, become independent without thereby ceasing to belong to the Community'. During 1960, agreements to transfer Community competences to individual states were signed; their independence was proclaimed; they joined the United Nations; and signed co-operation agreements with France. Thus Cameroon, Togo, Mali (formerly Sudan), Senegal (the two states had in the meantime separated), Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Upper Volta, Niger, Mauritania, the Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Chad and Mauritius became fully independent states, linked to France by bilateral agreements. Lacking any real function, the Community institutions disappeared in 1961.

Henceforth France's relations with the newly independent African states were organised according to the principles of international law and came under the Foreign Ministry. Yet the co-operation agreements (managed by the Ministry of Co-operation) permitted the once privileged links between France and its former African empire to survive. Moreover there was attached to the president of the Republic a general secretary for African and Madagascan affairs, Jacques Foccart, who came to be seen as the real controller of France's African policy. The policy itself was based on systematic support for the fledgling states created in 1960, with aid taking the form of credits for development, technical assistance via the sending of civil servants and, especially, teachers, and also of military backing – as, for example, when help was given in February 1964 to the Gabon president Leon M'Ba after he was overthrown in a military putsch, or when Chad's President Tombalbaye was given support to defeat a rebellion. The counterpart of such support was that France gained a decisive political, cultural and, on occasion, economic influence in the African states – which in turn led to accusations of neo-colonialism.

It was in part as a response to this accusation that in March 1963 de Gaulle appointed a commission under the chairmanship of the former minister Jean-Marcel Jeanneney to conduct a thorough investigation into the question of co-operation. The Jeanneney report, presented to the president in July 1963, advocated the ending of the privileged relations of co-operation that existed between France and its former colonies. It proposed grouping the whole policy area under the Foreign Ministry, doing away with any geographical considerations, and extending the benefits of aid to all the Third World countries, including Asia and Latin America. Though de Gaulle praised the spirit that underlay the report, particularly in his press conference of 31 January 1964, he took great care not to put it



into practice. Right up until 1969, co-operation continued to privilege the countries of the ex-Community and turned them, for all the proclamations of independence, into a French sphere of influence. Yet the fact remains that with the achievement of independence in 1960 by the African and Madagascan territories, the process of French decolonisation was nearly complete. The status of overseas departments (given to Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, Guyana, Saint Pierre and Miquelon) and overseas territories (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, the Comores) turned these remnants of empire into portions of the national territory.

How did the French people evaluate the process which led the African colonies to independence? An opinion poll of February 1959 asked the following question: 'By creating the Community of France and the overseas countries de Gaulle has given the former colonies the chance to gain their independence when they want it. Do you support this measure?' 73 per cent of those questioned replied positively as against 9 per cent who disapproved. And once the process was complete, two opinion polls of November 1961 and December 1962 showed that 54 per cent of the French felt that de Gaulle's decolonisation policy in black Africa had been a success as against, respectively, 12 and 13 per cent who felt it had failed. The conclusion is unambiguous: decolonisation had the overwhelming support of the French people.

Yet decolonisation was simply the removal of a difficulty in the same way that Algeria (as we have seen, a much bigger problem) had been. Once it was out of the way, the president of the Republic was free to turn to the essentials. In a radio and television broadcast of 19 April 1963, de Gaulle declared that since the country was 'for the first time in half a century free in its judgements and in its action, it could . . . and must . . . play the world role which is its own'. What remained to be determined was whether France possessed the resources to play such a role.

### *The rejection of the American protectorate*

Was de Gaulle's 'grand design' to enable his country to play a major role in world affairs compatible with France's real resources? Was it realistic to envisage an autonomous policy given that France was a full member of the Atlantic Alliance, that its security depended on the American 'nuclear umbrella', use of which depended solely on the president of the United States, and that a large part of its armed forces were integrated into the NATO forces which were also under American command? One is bound to state that the obligations accepted in 1949 by the Fourth Republic, and approved at that time by de Gaulle, prohibited France from having its own strategy and made her, like the other Alliance members, a pawn on a chess-board where the United States alone could decide the moves.



Such a subordinate position was clearly unacceptable to the president of the Republic who regarded the autonomy of decision-taking in foreign policy as a *sine qua non* of state sovereignty. It was not that he sought to renounce the Atlantic Alliance; but he did believe that the latter should be a freely agreed pact (as it had indeed been) between equal partners (and it was undeniable that in this regard France was a vassal of the United States). De Gaulle rejected the idea that the fate of the world should be unilaterally determined by the two superpowers, each of which regarded the other states as so many cards in the poker game they played against each other. Against the 'spirit of Yalta' (or at least his interpretation of it), de Gaulle proclaimed the right of nations to promote and defend their own interests. To do so they needed the necessary means – which is why the possession of nuclear weapons was to de Gaulle the essential agent of the independent policy which he intended to pursue. He wrote in his *Memoirs of Hope* that 'my aim was to disengage France not from the Atlantic Alliance, which I determined to maintain as the ultimate deterrent, but from the integrated structures of NATO with its American command; to develop with each of the East European states, and in the first place Russia, relations that would evolve from *détente* to *entente* and co-operation; to do the same, when the time was ripe, with China; and to provide France with a nuclear capability that would prevent anyone from attacking us save at the risk of unimaginable damage'.

The principal analytical basis of this comprehensive restructuring of French foreign policy was the perception that the world of 1958 was different from that of 1949. To put it briefly, de Gaulle believed that there was no longer a communist threat to Europe, that the West's material progress rendered implausible any domestic communist bid for power, and that armed Soviet intervention leading to world war was improbable. Given that the threat no longer existed, there was no longer the need for protection, particularly since the latter was, in de Gaulle's eyes, illusory. The nuclear balance that had been established between the United States and the Soviet Union ruled out, in de Gaulle's judgement, any possibility that the two powers would strike directly at each other since the only outcome would be mutual annihilation; whereas a conflict limited to the territory of Western Europe would not threaten the superpowers with the same risks and inconveniences. Hence membership of NATO managed to deprive France both of her autonomy and of any real protection; her role was simply that of battleground for two foreign armies.

The series of events that followed de Gaulle's return to power served to confirm de Gaulle's analysis. 1957–8 saw the development of the British nuclear capability and also, following President Eisenhower's agreement, the creation of a two-power, Anglo-American directory that gave the two states a nuclear monopoly within the Atlantic Alliance. On 3 July 1958 the



two countries signed an agreement on the exchange of confidential information and the sale to the United Kingdom of engines for nuclear submarines, of plans and uranium 235. The very next day the United States Secretary of State met de Gaulle in Paris and refused to give France nuclear aid so long as she would not accept on her soil the intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBM) which NATO had agreed to install. Faced with the emerging perspective of a two-power directory inside NATO, de Gaulle decided on a direct challenge to his partners: on 17 September 1958 he proposed the creation of a three-power directory within NATO (the United States, the United Kingdom and France) which would involve joint consultations on the definition of political and military strategy, the collective control of the Alliance's nuclear weapons, and the sharing of nuclear secrets and joint commands in the various parts of the world in which Alliance members possessed interests (this could imply Algeria). On 20 October Eisenhower responded with a categorical rejection of this demand for the transformation of NATO structures on the grounds that the United States' interests and responsibilities were of a different scale from those of France and thus could not be reduced to a tripartite arrangement. He also felt that the other NATO members would oppose a three-power directory and that the United States did not believe it right to extend NATO's competence to other regions of the globe. Eisenhower's reply could not but confirm de Gaulle's conviction that the United States intended to remain sole master of the international community's response to the USSR, and that it refused to accept that its allies could be partners, seeking instead to confine them to the role of client and vassal. This analysis was further confirmed by the evolution of American strategy and military policy in the early 1960s.

The replacement of the doctrine of massive nuclear response to a USSR attack by that of 'graduated response' implied that before resorting to the use of nuclear weapons the United States would use traditional conventional forces; and within the Atlantic Alliance, where the United States alone held the nuclear sword, the European states, most notably France, provided the conventional shield. In de Gaulle's eyes this meant not only that the status of France declined from that of responsible partner to one of provider of infantry, but that the United States regarded the invasion of Western Europe as insufficient in itself to warrant a nuclear riposte (graduated response would allow Western Europe to be abandoned to its fate given that the use of its conventional forces appeared to be an adequate response). And was not Kennedy's 1962 proposal for a multilateral force anything more than a fresh attempt to gain control of the French and British nuclear arsenals? The United States unilaterally decided to abandon production of the Skybolt missiles which were to transport the British nuclear warheads and offered instead to make Polaris missiles



available to the European states (including France) on condition that they were integrated in the NATO arsenal and that their use was subordinated to the decision of the President of the United States. This was a proposal that in his press conference of January 14 1963 de Gaulle categorically rejected. 'Since when has it been proved that a people should remain deprived of its most effective weapons on the grounds that its most powerful potential adversary and its principal friend have much greater resources than its own?' It was with the same energy and for the same reasons that in autumn 1963 he refused France's signature to the treaty, drawn up by Kennedy and Khrushchev, banning above-ground nuclear tests.

Thus for the French government the position was clear. The United States government, irrespective of its president (and after Eisenhower, whom de Gaulle respected, and Kennedy, whom he admired, came Johnson with whom he found no common ground), sought to reduce the status of the member states of NATO. The affirmation of national independence required in consequence that France regain its autonomy *vis-à-vis* NATO and its full sovereignty over its armed forces. The United States' persistent refusal to consider a reform of NATO structures resulted in France's progressive distancing from them. In March 1959 her Mediterranean fleet withdrew from the integrated command structure, a move followed by the refusal to allow the United States to station atomic bombs in France. The means of air defence and of the surveillance of French airspace subsequently returned to national control. In June 1963 the Channel and Atlantic fleets were in their turn withdrawn from NATO command. The final, decisive measure came in February 1966. General de Gaulle announced the withdrawal of all French military units from the NATO-integrated command and requested the evacuation of all foreign bases on French territory or their control by the French authorities. On 1 July 1966 France's representatives left the military organisations of NATO, and on 1 April 1967 all the American and Canadian bases were evacuated. France had regained its full military sovereignty.

Yet an attitude that spoke to the desire for national independence in no sense marked a reversal of alliances. Though France withdrew from the military organisation of the Atlantic Alliance because it did not treat her as an equal partner, she stayed firmly within the political alliance. While refusing to be a protectorate of the United States, she agreed to be their ally. And de Gaulle showed himself in this sphere a partner of exemplary firmness. He demonstrated this firmness in May 1960 during the four-power conference in Paris when he counselled Eisenhower against making any concessions to a Khrushchev who was using the affair of the U2 spy-plane shot down over Soviet territory to embarrass the Western powers. The same firmness operated in 1962 during the superpower crisis caused by the installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba: the president of the



Republic assured Kennedy of his complete support in the confrontation with the Soviet Union. And while it is true that de Gaulle spared neither criticism nor provocative gestures at the expense of Lyndon Johnson's America (recognition of communist China, criticism of American intervention in Vietnam, the visit to the USSR, the violent anti-Israeli reaction during the Six Day War, the visits to Mexico and Canada), withdrawal from NATO in no sense prevented France from engaging in direct co-operation with it. France participated in NATO's air detection system, did not officially withdraw from the North Atlantic Council (NATO's political body), remained in contact with its military committee, was represented in the research teams for military technology and took part in NATO's various military and naval manoeuvres. Thus she remained, outside NATO, the dependable ally – but one possessed of full sovereignty – that she had sought to be within it in 1958. In April 1969, a few days before leaving power, de Gaulle decided to renew the Atlantic Alliance at the moment when its expiry date came up.

### *The refusal of technical and economic subjection*

The proclaimed desire for political and military independence was likely to remain wishful thinking so long as the United States was able to apply technological, economic and financial pressure on France. Thus de Gaulle's policy also required the conquest within these areas of an autonomy – not exempt from rivalry – with regard to his powerful ally.

In the technological sphere, the political necessity of independence from the United States was underlined by the implications of nuclear weaponry. It was further emphasised for reasons of prestige. The purpose here was to convince public opinion of the excellence of French technology in the face of the ostentatious disdain with which it was regarded by the American government, public opinion, and the prestige of institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) or the Harvard Business School, compared with which the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Centrale looked very second rate. This was the reason for the support, and the publicity, which de Gaulle's government lavished on major projects of an international dimension. Such projects, whose success rate varied widely, included the construction of the supersonic plane Concorde, the French colour television system SECAM, the French process of uranium enrichment, the launching in 1967 of the first French nuclear submarine, *Redoutable*, and the implementation in 1966 of the 'Plan Calcul' to give France a computer capacity after the American refusal in 1963 to sell France a computer deemed to be essential to the working of the nuclear strike force. For both government and public opinion the technological imperative was a proper response to the success of the 'American Challenge' which Jean-



Jacques Servan-Schreiber described in 1967. An IFOP poll of 1967 found that 46 per cent of the French regarded the essential interests of their country as different, or very different, from those of the United States, compared with only 29 per cent who saw them as similar or very similar.

Rivalry was economic and financial as well as technological. Was the pursuit of national independence compatible with the establishment in France of multinational companies, the larger part of whose capital base – and decision-taking centres – was frequently American? The risks of such a situation were obvious: the siting of factories, their closure or adaptation could be done without reference to France's employment or regional development policies. Obviously jobs resulted from such investment decisions; but the threat to abandon them could be seen to constitute an unacceptable pressure. The use by such firms of the most up-to-date technology in the sector concerned resulted in France achieving higher productivity levels, but it also led to an alarming technological dependency that went right against official public policy. Faced with the mixture of advantages and disadvantages that foreign investment brought, government policy showed evidence of uncertainty. Until 1962 the benefits to the national economy seemed to have the upper hand, and the government attempted to favour and to channel overseas capital, going so far as to give a very advantageous status to American companies. But from 1962–3 onwards, a series of redundancies in some French subsidiaries of American companies, the taking-over by Chrysler of Simca and the attempts by General Electric to gain control of the computer company Bull, aroused the suspicion of the government. As a result, Georges Pompidou laid down in 1963 the official doctrine of de Gaulle's Republic concerning overseas investments. They remained welcome so long as they took place in sectors that were vital to the development of the French economy – but on the express condition that they did not result in a particular economic or geographical zone becoming dependent on foreign control. This doctrine of national independence with regard to investment was applied in the following years in a somewhat haphazard manner. Eventually in 1967 a decree institutionalised state control over direct foreign investments: the latter were required to be declared to the Ministry of the Economy and Finances which had a two-month period in which to request an adjournment of the proposed operation.

The anxiety provoked by American investment in Europe – which public opinion regarded somewhat simplistically as the sale of the European economy to the Americans – explains why the problem of the dollar's role in the international monetary system (a problem that was by no means new) came to the fore of the policy agenda. Created at the end of the Second World War by the Bretton Woods agreement, the international monetary system replicated the inter-war practice of the Gold Standard by



making the dollar, which was convertible into gold at thirty-five dollars an ounce, the reserve currency and the one used in international transactions. By now the United States was running a commercial deficit which it financed by continually creating new dollars. The system could continue only so long as the other major industrial states which possessed dollar reserves did not seek to convert them into gold. If, on the other hand, these countries insisted on converting their dollar reserves into gold, the United States would be unable to oblige since the quantity of dollars far outstripped its own gold reserves. Obsessed by his war memories and urged on by his economic adviser Jacques Rueff, de Gaulle desired that gold should constitute 80 per cent of the Bank of France's reserves, and demanded that France's existing dollar reserves should be converted into gold. His insistence represented a threat both to the preponderance of the dollar and to the very basis of the international monetary system, and was in consequence hardly calculated to improve Franco-American relations.

Tension over financial problems reached a climax in de Gaulle's press conference of 4 February 1965 during which he delivered a withering critique of the international monetary system and roundly condemned the privileges of the dollar and the benefits that the United States derived from it.

The convention according to which the dollar possesses a transcendental value as an international currency no longer rests on its initial premise, namely that America possesses the bulk of the world's gold . . . The fact that many states accept, as a principle, dollars as well as gold as payment for the deficits which the American balance of payments engenders . . . leads the United States deliberately to acquire deficits abroad. The result is that they pay their overseas debts, at least in part, with the dollars that they alone can issue instead of honouring them fully with gold, whose value is assured and which needs to be earned before it can be owned.

After the critique came the proposal: the reconstruction of the international monetary system based on a return to the gold standard. Even though France was isolated in its attitude, this new attack on American pre-eminence provoked in the United States an exasperation that was all the more intense in that the critique was far from trivial and that de Gaulle had simply voiced what the monetary experts already felt about the failures of the system. France subsequently withdrew from the 'gold pool' in June 1967 (because the West German Bundesbank had promised not to convert its dollars into gold), and in November refused to accept the principle of special drawing rights (SDRs), a new mechanism designed to replace gold as the guarantor of currencies and in effect to maintain the American preponderance. Obviously the 1968 crisis, by weakening France's financial position, put an end to this monetary war against the dollar. It remains the case, however, that the policy was seen in the United States as evidence of



an anti-Americanism confirming the political and military aspects of the refusal of the American hegemony. De Gaulle always denied the reality of this anti-Americanism, claiming that his only objective was to defend the national interest by stopping France from resembling a mere American colony. His policy towards the United States was, moreover, massively popular with the French. Asked in October 1964 and May 1965 to say whether de Gaulle's American policy was 'correct', too harsh or too conciliatory, 51 and 50 per cent of the sample chose the first term, 18 and 16 per cent the second, and 5 and 6 per cent the third.

*The weapons of grandeur: the nuclear imperative*

De Gaulle's policy of national independence and his burning ambition to count for something in global politics made it essential for him to possess nuclear weapons, the core element of any international strategy. In this respect he was able to profit from the preliminary work in atom research undertaken by the Atomic Energy Commission created in 1945. 1954 saw the decisive turning-point: sympathetic to the arguments in favour of the construction of the atomic bomb put forward by Colonel Ailleret, General Chassin and René Pleven, Defence Minister in the Laniel government and also of de Gaulle himself, Pierre Mendès France created a committee on nuclear explosives and proposed the establishment of a study programme and the construction of a prototype nuclear weapon and nuclear submarine. Despite hesitations, a series of decisions was subsequently taken which resulted, particularly after the Suez crisis, in the acceleration of the French nuclear programme via the building of nuclear stations and of a plant of isotope separation. By the end of the Fourth Republic, the Atomic Energy Commission had begun to build the first experimental weapons, and the site of Reggane in the Sahara was selected for a first explosion which, it was decided in April 1958, should take place in the first quarter of 1960.

On his return to power, de Gaulle built on the nuclear legacy of the Fourth Republic, regarding it as the indispensable instrument of his chosen policy. The strategic priority henceforth accorded to nuclear weapons was shown by the choice as Minister of the Armed Forces of Pierre Guillaumat, the commissioner for atomic energy, and by the key role within the army given to such theoreticians of nuclear defence as General Ailleret. On 13 February 1960 the first French atomic bomb was exploded at Reggane, and de Gaulle telegraphed his army minister: 'Hurrah for France. As from this morning she is stronger and prouder.' France was from now on a member of the closed circle of nuclear powers. The head of state immediately set in motion a research programme for the development of the hydrogen bomb, and grew impatient at the delays that were necessary



before it could be completed. In August 1968 France's first H-bomb was exploded at Mururoa, the new nuclear site in the Pacific.

Though France now possessed the nuclear arsenal which guaranteed her status as a great power, she still lacked the means to make it operational. The result was that, at first, the air force was entrusted with the new nuclear strategy. The chosen instrument was the Mirage IV, built by the Dassault company – in 1967 a fleet of sixty-two Mirages capable of carrying 60 kilotonne A-bombs constituted the strike force known as the *force de frappe*. But as early as 1960 there began the development of a ground-based ballistic missile intended to replace the Mirage IVs – though they did not start to become operational until 1971. 1960 also saw the beginning of the development of a nuclear submarine, culminating in the March 1967 launch of the *Redoubtable*, and the construction of a sea-to-land ballistic missile carried by submarines. This became the core weapon since it was virtually impossible to detect and could strike virtually anywhere in the world. When the *Redoubtable* came into service in 1971 it was equipped with sixteen ballistic sea-to-land missiles with a range of 2,500–3,000 kilometres, each carrying a nuclear warhead of 500 kilotonnes. The vital importance accorded by the nuclear strategy to the air force and, in particular, the navy resulted in a decline in the importance of the land army whose total personnel fell from about 830,000 in 1958 to 333,000 in 1969–70.

The changeover from a conventional army integrated into Atlantic defence to an independent defence organised around nuclear deterrence had profound effects on the command structure and also on overall strategy. As regards the first, the nuclear force was seen as an essentially political weapon and thus depended on the civil power. The ordinance of 7 January 1959 defined defence as involving all sectors of the nation's life 'at all times, in all circumstances and against all forms of aggression'. Defence was thus attached to the prime minister, with the Ministry of National Defence disappearing from the ministerial nomenclature in favour of a Ministry of the Armed Forces, whose responsibility was to carry out governmental policy with the aid of the army chief of staff, who was the government's military adviser and not head of the armed forces. This primacy of the civil power over the army command was even more marked in the sphere of nuclear weapons. The constitution made the president of the Republic head of the armed forces, and a decree of 14 January 1964 highlighted his role even more strongly by making him, in case of war, responsible for the employment of the airborne strategic force. As controller of the nuclear capability, he was the undisputed master of France's deterrence strategy.

The latter was closely linked to the evolution of America's strategic doctrine in the 1960s. Having rejected, as we have seen, the American conception of graduated response, French strategy was based on nuclear



deterrence against a potential aggressor by 'an immediate response to the aggressor's potential using the most powerful weapons' (General Ailleret, *Revue de défense nationale*, January 1965). And to those who commented ironically on France's 'baby bomb' compared with the nuclear arsenals of the USA and USSR, de Gaulle retorted in his press conference of 23 July 1964:

It is obvious that the megatonnes which we could employ do not match the numbers which America and Russia could unleash. But once a certain nuclear capacity is reached and in regard to our direct defence, the size of the respective arsenals does not have an absolute value. For since a man and a country can only die once, deterrence exists once one has the means to inflict mortal damage on a possible aggressor, the determination to use them and the confidence in one's ultimate decision.

But against whom might nuclear deterrence be used? If in principle it was aimed against no one, since France was not an aggressor, in theory it could be used against anyone since nuclear weapons were the instrument of the policy of national independence. This was the meaning of an article by General Ailleret that provoked a sensation. 'Our autonomous force should in no circumstances be pointed in one direction – that of an *a priori* enemy – but should be capable of intervention anywhere, to use our military terminology *tous azimuts* [all directions].' Should this be seen, as some believed on the basis of de Gaulle's alleged anti-Americanism, as a wish to overturn France's alliance system? The hypothesis does not stand up to examination. It should be understood rather as a desire to conclude agreements on an equal footing, without any subordination; this was the sense of de Gaulle's wish to reach an agreement with the NATO command. In August 1967, conversations between General Ailleret and the NATO supreme commander General Lemnitzer provided for co-operation between the French army and the integrated NATO forces in the case of military engagement. Thus France's nuclear capability enabled de Gaulle to obtain the status of responsible partner which he had been denied in 1958.

De Gaulle's foreign policy and his desire for independence *vis-à-vis* the United States had received, as we have seen, widespread popular support; the nuclear capability that formed its counterpart was, by contrast, little understood by the French. For a variety of closely linked reasons – the nuclear deterrent was useless and expensive, its production harmed the budget and damaged national prosperity, it symbolised an out-of-date French bellicosity – the majority of the French were always hostile to de Gaulle's policy in this area. In 1959, 38 against 37 per cent did not want France to construct her own atomic bomb. After the nuclear tests of 1966, 1967 and 1968 at Mururoa, the percentages of those disapproving were



respectively 51, 56 and 52 (as against 34, 32 and 35 per cent who approved). And after that date, when France finally had an operational nuclear force, 43 per cent (against 37) felt that it did not guarantee the country's security, and 38 per cent (against 37) did not believe that it ensured its political independence. It was thus in the face of the hostility, or else the scepticism, of the majority of the French people that de Gaulle provided France with a nuclear force to guarantee her independence. The question then follows of what kinds of foreign policy it was supposed to make possible.

*The means of grandeur: hopes and disappointments in Europe*

As an instrument of deterrence and a political weapon enabling France to join the great powers' club, the nuclear arsenal – a force that was not to be used – was more a symbol of grandeur than a means of achieving it. Though de Gaulle aimed at a world role for France, he could not be ignorant of the fact that France was actually a medium-size power whose strength compared very poorly with that of the two superpowers. So how was this superpower directorate to be challenged in a way that would allow France to have her say? De Gaulle regarded the European edifice which he had inherited from the Fourth Republic as an asset which he could exploit.

It is important to understand what is meant by this. De Gaulle's understanding of the term 'European' was not that of the founders of post-war Europe, and he had no sympathy whatsoever for the institutionalised supranationalism, linked to the United States in NATO and anxious to integrate the United Kingdom, associated with Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet in France, Paul-Henri Spaak in Belgium and Konrad Adenauer in Bonn. Proof of this lies in the bitter struggle waged by de Gaulle and his supporters against the European Defence Community between 1950 and 1954. De Gaulle's conception of Europe was of an entity independent of the two blocs organised around the United States and the Soviet Union; its independence would enable it to play an autonomous world role and to defend its interests. The need to be free of American tutelage explains de Gaulle's hostility to British membership of the Common Market since he regarded the United Kingdom as too close to the United States and feared that its adhesion would transform the Community into an American-dominated zone. Moreover, his belief that states formed the only meaningful political reality led him to refuse to accept that nations (and in particular the French nation) should ever dissolve into some supranational entity. His vision was essentially that of a confederation of nations determining together a common policy – a confederation, moreover, in which French influence would therefore operate not merely through France (too small a power at global level), but through the intermediary of a politically



united Europe which would have enough weight to influence world events. Europe would enable France to preserve its global influence despite having been compelled by circumstances to abandon its empire. Yet this assumed that France's partners inside the Common Market would agree to participate in an enterprise whose benefits were obvious to Paris but appeared much less so in other European capitals.

In what sort of condition was Europe when de Gaulle returned to power? It was actually in a state of convalescence, after the crisis of the European Defence Community which had destroyed the hopes of the supranationalists, and had retreated to more limited goals of an economic and technical nature. The signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 led to the creation of the European Economic Community which sought the removal of all trade barriers within the six member states, and of Euratom. We have seen that de Gaulle decided to carry on with the policy of the Fourth Republic; thanks to the Pinay-Rueff plan, France was able to participate in the first lowering of tariff barriers on 1 January 1959, and she subsequently insisted on the speeding-up of the process so that the customs union came into being on 1 July 1968, ten months ahead of the time-scale laid down in the Treaty. In exchange for this European good will, France urged the creation of a common agricultural policy, indispensable for her farmers, and the principle of the extension of the Common Market to agriculture was adopted in 1962, though the issue of its financing was to cause problems that were more difficult to solve.

De Gaulle's Republic accepted with good grace the organisation of the European Economic Community which it perceived as an agent of development for the French economy, and thus as a means of power. Yet it was clear that what really mattered for de Gaulle was not economics but the construction of a political Europe. In this respect the resistance that he met from his Community partners would defeat his grand European design.

It was evident that France's partners within the European Economic Community had not given up on their plans for a supranational Europe linked to the United States and to Great Britain. They regarded the commission of the Common Market, under its German president Walter Hallstein, as the instrument of the evolution they desired – an increase in the powers of the commission, and the use of majority voting in the council of ministers, composed of representatives of the member states. Both proposals were unacceptable to a France that rejected all supranationalism and was unwilling to allow any limitation on her sovereignty. In 1961, de Gaulle unveiled his own plan as an alternative to the vision that he rejected. In February of that year the heads of state and government of the Six met in Paris and established a commission to study the bases of the political union advocated by France. Chaired by Christian Fouchet of France and run by the diplomat Jean-Marie Soutou, the commission



drafted in October 1961 a 'union of states' that recognised the personality of the member peoples and states but organised their co-operation in the spheres of defence, diplomacy and culture. The 'Fouchet plan' proposed common institutions: a council of heads of state and government taking decisions on the basis of unanimity; a parliamentary assembly composed of delegations of the parliaments of the Six, with purely consultative attributions; and a political commission composed of top civil servants to be the effective executive of the union. After endless discussions, and despite the support of the Germans, the Italians and the Luxembourgeois, the Fouchet plan finally collapsed in April 1962 in the face of the determined opposition of the Belgian Paul-Henri Spaak and Holland's Joseph Luns, both of whom were determined to torpedo a project that they regarded as sounding the death-knell of a supranational Europe. This was the politics of all or nothing, and its consequences were considerable. De Gaulle's disappointment showed itself by the summary way in which he subsequently dealt with European projects he disliked – which were of course the ones favoured by those who were nostalgic for supranationalism.

The first sign of how de Gaulle intended henceforth to deal with European issues came shortly after the final burial of the Fouchet plan, in his press conference of 15 June 1962. Following a declaration of patriotic faith and the reaffirmation that the only possible Europe was a 'Europe of countries' – for 'Dante, Goethe, Chateaubriand would not have served Europe very well if they had been stateless men thinking and writing in some form of integrated esperanto or Volapük' – the president of the Republic declared open war on the supporters of European integration, bluntly accusing them of minimising national realities the more easily to bring Europe under American tutelage.

It is true that in this, as they say, 'integrated' Europe no political will would exist. Once France, and Europe – and their politics – ceased to be, unless a policy could be imposed on each of the six states, none would be attempted. Yet in such circumstances it might well be that this grouping would put itself at the service of some outside power, which for its part would certainly know what it was doing. Then there might indeed be a federator – but he would not be European.

These words led to the resignation from the government of the MRP ministers now that the head of state had slammed the door on the supporters of a supranational Europe.

The latter had to endure another snub, with de Gaulle's veto on British membership of the Common Market. On 26 July 1961 the United Kingdom had announced its desire to enter the Europe of the Six from which it had hitherto maintained a prudent distance. Complicated negotiations followed – but the real issue lay elsewhere, in de Gaulle's scepticism



regarding the authenticity of Britain's European sentiments. At a time when President Kennedy was advocating the creation of a vast Atlantic community which, on the basis of a partnership, would have the effect of dissolving the nascent European unity into a constellation animated by the United States, the president of France was tempted to see the United Kingdom as the Trojan Horse that would destroy from within the construction of the Europe of the Six. He was to make this abundantly clear in his *Memoirs of Hope*. 'Just as the English had sought, unsuccessfully, to prevent the Community from coming into being, so now they attempted to paralyse it from within.' Such positions sealed the fate of British membership. Repeated conversations between de Gaulle and the British prime minister Harold Macmillan, who tried to convince him of the reality of his European conversion, and the signature in November 1962 of a Franco-British agreement jointly to build the supersonic aeroplane Concorde had no effect. De Gaulle told Macmillan at their Rambouillet meeting on 15 December 1962 that he did not believe that the conditions existed for British membership, a judgement confirmed a week later by the decision taken by Macmillan and Kennedy in the Bahamas that Britain should accept America's offer of the Polaris missile for its nuclear strike force. To de Gaulle this showed yet again Britain's alignment with the Americans. Hence he confirmed France's refusal of the British application in the press conference of 14 January 1963, a decision that paid scant attention to the pro-British entry wishes of his Community partners.

It may be that one day England will manage the transformation that would enable it to become a member of the European Community, without restriction and without hesitation and in preference to anything else ... It may also be the case that England is not yet ready for such a change and this is certainly what appears to emerge from the oh so lengthy conversations in Brussels.

The same response came in 1967 when the Labour prime minister Harold Wilson, urged on by his foreign secretary George Brown, returned to the attack. De Gaulle's press conference of 16 May 1967 was the occasion for him to declare that in his judgement the necessary transformation – both economic and political – that could permit British membership (essentially, the establishing of its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the United States) had not yet been achieved.

The brutality of this attitude, which translates the depth of de Gaulle's disappointment at the ruin of his hopes for the construction of a political Europe speaking with one voice (preferably his own), was repeated in the long institutional and political crisis that affected Europe in 1965. The crisis had a double origin. It came in part from the difficulties produced by the financing of the common agricultural policy, which France regarded as



fundamental but which provoked unease amongst her partners. Yet there was, too, another motive – the double offensive of the champions of integration, who both supported the efforts of Walter Hallstein to give a real political role to the EEC commission and also demanded full application of articles 145 and 148 of the Treaty of Rome providing the council of ministers with decision-taking powers based on majority voting. On 30 June 1965, Maurice Couve de Murville unleashed a carefully prepared European crisis whose goals were the implementation of the agricultural policy, the rejection of the claims of the commission (which he regarded as a simple meeting of experts without any political power), and the modification of articles 145 and 148. France took note of the failure of the on-going negotiations and decided on an indefinite abstention from all participation in European organisations. The ‘policy of the empty chair’ meant that the EEC was stalled and that its break-up became a real threat.

The crisis was not resolved until January 1966, on terms that gave France almost everything she wanted. She won on the financing of the common agricultural policy. A fourteen-member commission replaced the executives of the Steel and Coal Community, the European Economic Community and Euratom; Walter Hallstein, the champion of the commission’s political powers, decided not to stand for its presidency. The post went instead to the Belgian Jean Rey, and the commission became henceforth a body responsible for drawing up proposals, implementing decisions and arranging compromises. It was the council of ministers which had the real decision-taking power. Finally, the ‘Luxembourg compromise’, signed on 30 January 1966, conceded the French demand that when a council decision concerned the vital interests of one or several member states it had to be accepted unanimously. Thus each country had the power of veto – something that was hardly in the spirit of the Treaty of Rome.

Overall de Gaulle accepted the Community as it was, once he had failed to impose the political Europe that he wanted. But to preserve his conception of the nation-state, he had obliged it to function through a series of crises, diktats and threats. As a result, the Community in 1969 was a long way removed from what it had been at its origins: it had become a closed arena in which the rival national interests of its members clashed, and decisions were taken on the principle that untidy compromises were better than total disintegration. All this was far from the European idealism that the founding fathers had tried to institutionalise in the early 1950s. It is also true that what happened was equally distant from de Gaulle’s hopes of creating an independent European entity, separate from the two superpower blocs, and the potential instrument of the grand policy of which he dreamed. What was true of Europe would also prove to



be true of the Franco-German *entente* that de Gaulle aimed to make the corner-stone of his European policy.

*Successes and disappointments of the Paris–Bonn axis*

On 14 September 1958 de Gaulle received at his residence in Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, and in the capacity of prime minister of the moribund Fourth Republic, his German equivalent Konrad Adenauer. Out of this initial contact there developed between the two men a personal friendship that would lead, over time, to a political *entente*. Its bases have been amply described: the desire for reconciliation felt by two historical figures of gigantic stature; the necessity on the German side for dialogue with a powerful neighbour who had become an ally instead of an adversary owing to the division of Germany into two and the presence of Soviet troops on the eastern borders of the Federal Republic. The French believed for their part that the Federal Republic, given its need for protection, would constitute an ideal partner in a Europe freed from any subjection to the United States. However unrealistic such analyses might seem, they became for a few years the essential basis of the policy of Franco-German *rapprochement*. With the exception of a few moments of diplomatic uncertainty and chill occasioned by de Gaulle's brusque behaviour towards the United States, good relations flourished via a series of visits and speeches. Chancellor Adenauer visited France from 2 to 9 July 1962 – the powerful image remains of the two old men seated side by side in the nave of Reims Cathedral – and his visit was returned by the president of the French Republic from 4 to 9 September of the same year. During his stay, de Gaulle addressed workers, military officers and students, and was received with such popular enthusiasm that the German press, half-jokingly and half-admiringly, evoked the inheritance of the Carolingians and the consecration of the French president as emperor of Europe. Out of these visits of friendship and the acclamations of the crowd emerged the signature at the Elysée Palace on 23 January 1963 of the Franco-German Treaty.

What then was the political content of the Paris–Bonn axis, proclaimed to the world with such solemnity? From a severely practical point of view, the results were extremely limited. Leaving aside a number of pious declarations, it was agreed that regular meetings should take place 'at least twice a year' between the heads of state and government, and that the foreign ministers should meet 'at least four times a year'. The ministers of defence, education and youth for the two countries were also to meet every two months. An organisation was established to develop exchanges between French and German youth: this was the Franco-German Youth Office which officially came into being in July 1963. Thus if one leaves aside the emphasis laid on education, the treaty provided simply for the



promise of dialogue. It is true that there were no bilateral conflicts between the two states.

Yet the Franco-German triumph of 1962–3 brought no follow-up for de Gaulle, and did not live up to the expectations which he had placed on it. The Paris–Bonn axis in particular never became the bedrock of the European policy of his dreams. This was due in the first place to the realities of geopolitics. Located as it was in proximity to the Soviet bloc, the Federal Republic relied for its security above all on the United States, and was wholly unable to accept the policy of independence *vis-à-vis* the latter that de Gaulle aimed to promote. France's fledgling nuclear force of 1963 in no sense constituted an alternative to the American nuclear umbrella. President Kennedy's voyage to Germany in 1963, his declaration 'Ich bin ein Berliner' that amounted to a declaration to defend West Berlin against any Soviet threat, made the Elysée treaty look very small beer. The proposal for a multinational force (which France refused) rekindled interest in membership of NATO just at the moment when France was withdrawing its Mediterranean fleet from it. To sum up, when asked to choose between the United States and an autonomous Europe dominated by France, Germany had no hesitation in opting for the former. It was also the case that if Konrad Adenauer, despite a few reserves, was unquestionably sympathetic to de Gaulle, the same could not be said of the bulk of West Germany's political class, for whom its Chancellor's personal policy and de Gaulle's arrogance were a matter for exasperation. Invited on 8 May 1963 to ratify the Elysée treaty, the Bundestag unanimously coupled it with a preface that was a snub to both signatories – and particularly to the French president – in asserting that the document existed within the framework of the major commitments of the Federal Republic. These commitments were spelled out as follows:

The maintenance and development of the *entente* between the free peoples – with particularly close co-operation between Europe and the United States – the application of the right to self-determination of the German people and the re-establishment of German unity, a common defence within the framework of NATO and the integration of the forces belonging to the Alliance, the unification of Europe along the lines established by the creation of the European Communities and with the inclusion of England.

In reality the Elysée treaty was largely the achievement of a Chancellor urged by his political allies to retire. Gerhard Schröder, foreign minister of the Federal Republic since 1961, was always reserved about the treaty and did not conceal the antipathy he felt for de Gaulle. Being favourable to a close understanding with the United States and to Britain's entry into the Common Market, he adopted a position of near-systematic opposition to French positions. Adenauer's retirement at the end of 1963 and his



replacement by Ludwig Erhard, who took little interest in foreign affairs, left Schröder with his hands free. As a result, Paris counted for little in Bonn's decisions. The Federal Republic refused any agreement with France over colour television systems, applauded the multilateral force and supported American policy in Vietnam.

The Paris-Bonn axis that de Gaulle had desired was in fact stillborn in 1963. If there were to be fruits of his policy in this area, they would come in the future. De Gaulle can be credited with real vision in perceiving that geopolitical reasons argued in favour of a Franco-German *rapprochement*. It can also be noted that he did no more than pursue, with greater panache and sense of drama, the policy inaugurated by Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet in 1950 which also led to Franco-German *rapprochement*. Yet it must be admitted that as an instrument of the policy of grandeur, the Paris-Bonn axis was no more successful than political Europe in responding to the hopes de Gaulle had placed in them. Given that these methods of realising a policy of grandeur had failed, did it, therefore, follow that de Gaulle would be obliged to abandon the attempt to play a world role? There remained one potential sphere of action where no material constraint could prevent his actions and where his talent for media communication – gesture, symbol, discourse – could give full vent to its expression.

#### *The global dimension: the Yalta syndrome*

If there was one constant and dominating theme in de Gaulle's whole policy, it was beyond doubt the refusal to accept the global balance that had emerged out of the Second World War and that gave the two superpowers the responsibility for determining the fate of the world. For de Gaulle, this was the result of the Yalta Conference and of the carving-up of the world that took place there (most historians do not accept this interpretation). The Yalta syndrome dominated both his thought and his action; and we have seen how – from the rejection of the American protectorate to the construction of the nuclear strike force, from his concept of Europe to his desire for *rapprochement* with Germany – much of his policy was determined by his wish to oppose to the world that Yalta had created France's national independence and freedom of movement. The same theme provides the key to an understanding of the relations that, in the eleven years of its existence, de Gaulle's Republic established with the outside world.

The rejection of the politics of the two superpower blocs, the determination not to allow one big power to speak for a whole camp and to prevent, so far as France was concerned, the United States from monopolising dialogue with the communist world, were demonstrated by de Gaulle's attempts to develop direct relations with the socialist states. For such a champion of the nation-state, moreover, ideology was simply a thin veneer



spread over geopolitical realities that ensured that the Soviet Union was in reality still Russia, animated by the same national ambitions as in the days of the Tsarist empire and which were, for the present, merely concealed under the mask of Marxist–Leninist doctrine. Thus, while showing exemplary firmness at times of international crises (Berlin in autumn 1958, Cuba in 1962), de Gaulle intended to develop direct relations with the Soviet leadership without seeking the approval of Washington. Nikita Khrushchev's visit to France in March 1960 produced few results apart from the decision to hold a four-power conference in Paris in May – a conference which the Soviet leader torpedoed via the U2 spy-plane affair. The great thaw in Franco-Soviet relations began in 1963. Between 20 and 30 June 1966, de Gaulle visited Russia where he signed commercial, economic, technical and scientific agreements to be supervised by a permanent, mixed Franco-Soviet commission. For de Gaulle the most important decision was undoubtedly the installation of a direct telephone line between the Kremlin and the Elysée, analogous to that between Moscow and Washington, which demonstrated that France enjoyed an autonomous status in relation to the United States.

Rejection of the spirit of Yalta did not simply mean denying the United States the right to speak in the name of France. It also meant the desire to establish direct relations with the satellites of the Soviet Union. It should be said that in this domain, de Gaulle's realism, which existed alongside his visionary nature, led him to say, and do, nothing which might alarm their Soviet protector. Yet when visiting Poland in September 1967 he did not hesitate, despite Gomulka's reservations, to criticise the bloc system, to exalt the independence which France enjoyed, and discreetly to invite the Poles to 'Look far and high' despite all the obstacles. His language was even more direct in Romania, which he visited in May 1968 (at the height of the student crisis in Paris) and where he energetically denounced the subjection of the many countries that 'divided up between two opposing blocs, are subject to a political, economic and military direction from outside, and endure the permanent presence of foreign troops on their territory'.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the forces of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968, which put an end to the 'Prague Spring', provided the illustration of his words and his arguments. The communiqué published by the presidency after the events contained a clear condemnation of the Soviet action, but stigmatised even more directly the responsibility for what had happened of the two superpowers, signatories of the Yalta agreements.

The armed intervention of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia shows that the Moscow government has not broken free of the system of blocs imposed on Europe as a result of the Yalta agreements, a system that is



incompatible with the right of peoples to decide their own destiny and that can only result, as it results today, in international tension.

It was, however, inevitable that the Yalta syndrome should result in behaviour which was more often than not at the expense of the Americans, given that they dominated the bloc that most directly threatened the French desire for independence. We should not, therefore, be surprised that France's global policy often appeared to be clothed in anti-Americanism. For example, the recognition given to Communist China in January 1964 – after Edgar Faure's preparatory visit in 1963 – appeared as a direct snub to the United States which, since 1949, had, wholly unrealistically, considered that the only China was the one governed in Taiwan by the aged marshal Chaing Kai Shek. The United States was even more irritated by criticisms of its overseas interventions. Thus, in 1965, the council of ministers expressed its disapproval of the intervention of American troops in San Domingo with the aim of supporting the military dictatorship and preventing the return of the former president, Juan Bosch, who was suspected of leftist sympathies. Yet what really exasperated Washington was the criticism of its actions in the Indo-China peninsula. Though Eisenhower and Kennedy listened politely to the counsels of non-intervention which the elderly General de Gaulle showered on them in 1959 and 1961, they both acted as they saw fit – and thus went down the dangerous road of political intervention and war. From 1963 onwards, de Gaulle came out openly in favour of independence and self-determination for the peoples of Indo-China and became ever more critical of President Johnson's policy of military escalation. In 1966 he advocated a solution to the conflict – the neutralisation of the peninsula – that caused great indignation in Washington. And in the light of what he considered as American blindness he made a spectacular demonstration of his disapproval of United States policy. On a visit to Cambodia in September 1966, he made a resounding speech at Phnom Penh in which he laid all responsibility for the conflict on the Americans and advised them to withdraw their forces and open negotiations for the re-establishment of peace and the neutralisation of the region. The speech had no immediate effect but undoubtedly contributed, via its enormous impact on the Third World, to the evolution of international opinion. When, on 3 March 1968, President Johnson announced the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam and agreed to enter into contact with his adversaries, Paris was chosen as the site for the discussions. They opened on 13 May 1968, the same day the first barricades went up in the Latin Quarter.

De Gaulle's challenge to American hegemony and his desire to destroy the two blocs went further still when he attempted to match the policy he applied to the satellite states of the Soviet Union by establishing a direct



link with the nations of the American continent, the reserved domain of the United States. Early in 1964 he travelled to Mexico and unleashed mass enthusiasm by declaring '*marchamos la mano en la mano*' ('we walk together'). Six months later, between 20 September and 16 October, he visited ten countries in Latin America: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil. At the gates of the United States, he railed against hegemonies, eulogised national independence and provoked torrents of acclamation – but became clearly aware (as his hosts sometimes reminded him) that the political and economic balance of the continent depended on American control and that France had nothing to offer in replacement.

The assessment of these visits as being so many popular triumphs unmatched by any concrete result can also be applied to the most spectacular – and most controversial – of all de Gaulle's foreign visits, the one he made to Canada in July 1967. In Quebec he repeatedly referred to the province's French past, posed the question of the future of French-speaking Canadians in terms of self-determination and independence, and promised France's support for the barriers which the latter were erecting against the oppressive influence of the United States. In de Gaulle's 24 July speech from the balcony of the Montreal town hall, the affirmation of 'Quebec, master of its destinies' took the lapidary and provocative form of 'long live free Quebec'. When the Canadian prime minister, Lester Pearson, responded by declaring the phrase to be unacceptable, de Gaulle decided to cut short his Canadian trip and returned to Paris. His words provoked a considerable storm in Canada, causing virtually unanimous outrage among the English-speaking population and providing an unexpected boost for the independence-seeking minority in Quebec. French public opinion, for once, did not support the position taken by the president of the Republic. In response to an IFOP poll of early August, 45 per cent of the French disapproved, and only 18 per cent approved, of what looked like a gratuitous insult to Canada, a country for which public opinion felt neither the antipathy nor the exasperation which it did in some circumstances for the United States.

It is true that 1967 saw the emergence of a split between the French people and their president over foreign policy issues. In the years following 1958, the French had given massive support to a policy which responded to their deepest wishes; from now on they felt a growing incomprehension and unease in the face of the gestures – gratuitous, ostentatious and on occasion provocative as these were – in which de Gaulle seemed to delight. A few days before leaving for Canada, his response to the latest stage in the Arab–Israeli conflict provoked the same sense of surprise and disarray. Ever since the days of the Fourth Republic and the struggles waged by Israel against its Arab neighbours, and by France against Arab-supported



nationalism in North Africa, close relations had been forged between the two countries, particularly in the areas of military co-operation and shared political views. Yet the end of the Algerian war had witnessed a partial change in this state of affairs. Henceforth France was no longer at war with any Arab country and, by the same token, the way was open for a reorientation of French policy to these same states. For a strategist like de Gaulle, whose analyses were global in scale, the possibilities opened up by the immense Arab world were of a wholly different character from those deriving from links with an Israel that was at once tiny and the devoted ally of the United States. To these objective arguments in favour of a revision of French policy in the Near East could be added the evidence of events which showed that Israel appeared to take little notice of France's influence. In May 1967, Colonel Nasser, having demanded the withdrawal of the United Nations forces which, since 1965, had controlled the Israeli-Egyptian frontier, decided to blockade the Gulf of Akaba, thereby strangling the Israeli port of Eilat. In the face of the tension that this caused between the two countries, France declared itself in favour of a solution to the conflict by way of a conference of the great powers and sought to dissuade the warring parties from resorting to force. A declaration of 2 June went so far as to state that 'the country which takes the initiative, in any location, in using force would have neither the approval nor, obviously, the support of France'. Yet, on 5 June, Israel moved onto the offensive and by the end of the Six Day War had won an overwhelming victory. On the very first day of the conflict the French government reacted by announcing its decision to suspend all deliveries of arms material to the countries of the Near East – an embargo which in reality affected only Israel, the major client of France's weapons industry. A communiqué published on 21 June condemned Israel's opening of hostilities, and France voted for the United Nations resolution, put forward by Yugoslavia, which called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces. This unilateral condemnation of Israel offended a section of French public opinion and was then followed by the blunder of de Gaulle's declarations in his press conference of 27 November 1967. Asked to explain the events of June 1967, de Gaulle gave an historical account of the settlement of the Jews in Israel, and of the origins of the conflict, that laid almost all the blame for the crisis on the Jewish state. De Gaulle's explanation rested on an ethnic determinism that many saw as containing elements of racism or anti-Semitism.

One is entitled to consider whether . . . the implantation of this community on land acquired in more or less legitimate ways and in the midst of Arab peoples who were profoundly hostile to it was not bound to lead to constant and interminable friction and conflict. Some people might even fear that the Jews – who even in the time of their dispersal remained what they had always been, that is to say an élite people, sure of themselves and



dominating – might not decide, once they had come together in the place of their ancient grandeur, to transform into an ardent and conquering ambition the profoundly moving hopes they had held for nineteen centuries.

Despite all the denials, explanations and exegeses that de Gaulle and his supporters subsequently issued, the impact of his declaration would not go away. It made it look as if de Gaulle had decided on an agonising reappraisal of France's alliances and friendships, in which support for Israel was exchanged for the backing of the Arab world, a move that without doubt accorded more closely with the overall global strategy he had elaborated over the years.

Yet many people found it difficult to accept de Gaulle's position – and once again the opinion polls are revealing. When asked whether they approved or disapproved of his stance in the Arab–Israeli conflict, a narrow majority (36 per cent against 30) gave their support in August 1967. After the 27 November press conference, however, things changed. An IFOP poll of December 1967 showed that 33 per cent disapproved and 30 per cent approved; virtually identical responses were given in January 1969. Hence it is not an exaggeration to say that the summer of 1967 witnessed a decisive shift in the hitherto massive approval given by the French to de Gaulle's foreign policy. They had been strongly supportive of the policy of national independence, of the denunciation of the domination of the superpowers, of the firm language addressed to the United States and the refusal of its political, military and economic protectorate; they had also backed de Gaulle's European policy and the *rapprochement* with Federal Germany. But they ceased to support the head of state once his actions became wholly dominated by the strategic calculations of *realpolitik* and took no account of the feelings and aspirations of public opinion. By the same token the distance that grew up between public opinion and the president deprived the latter of the resources with which to pursue his policy. In 1968 began the period of turbulence which was to threaten de Gaulle's Republic from within and result in the abandonment of the great global vision shortly before de Gaulle's departure from power.

By what criteria should the results of de Gaulle's global policy be judged? Using those of *realpolitik* it was a failure, in the sense that France counted for very little in a world that was ever more completely regulated by the dialogue, or the conflict, between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was, moreover, obvious from the outset that France lacked the resources to pursue it; the disappointments of the European policy, the Franco-German *rapprochement*, and the Latin American trips provide painful evidence of the disparity between France and the giant whose hegemony it sought to challenge. In the same way the Soviet intervention in Prague



reduced to the level of mere incantation de Gaulle's declarations on national independence and the end of blocs. Yet it would be much too simple to leave things there. It is obvious that the president of the French Republic played the role of stimulant in international relations, and it is not an exaggeration to see the 1960s as the age of de Gaulle. More than anyone else – albeit in a sometimes provocative manner – he helped to make public opinion aware of the real problems of the time: the dysfunctioning of the international monetary system, the problems of the Third World, the refusal to subordinate national interests to a powerful protector. So far as France herself was concerned, he was able to win the support of public opinion for a foreign policy doctrine that had as its basis the refusal of blocs and the guaranteeing of national independence through the creation of a nuclear force. Yet the exalted nature of the discourse did not blind the French to reality. An IFOP poll of January 1968 showed that if 34 per cent (against 33 per cent) of the French believed that France was capable of carrying out an independent policy, 42 per cent (against 28 per cent) did not believe that her independence extended to the military domain, and 47 per cent (against 26 per cent) felt that it did not exist in the economic sphere either. So was it worthwhile carrying on with the sacrifices that the policy of independence entailed? In 1967 – at the very moment when public opinion began to question de Gaulle's foreign policy objectives and methods – a gap appeared between, on the one hand, the desire of the French for an easier life, for greater social justice, for a transformation of human relationships and for new forms of social organisation and, on the other, a policy of grandeur that derived from a different universe. The scene was thus set for the twilight of de Gaulle's Republic and for a decline of which 1968 would provide brutal evidence.







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## Part 3

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# **The twilight of de Gaulle's Republic**







## Early symptoms of a waning power

There is a curious paradox about 1962. After the two autumn elections de Gaulle's political authority looked to be at its zenith. He had crushed the entire French party system, ensured the victory of his conception of the constitutional order, and surrounded himself with a parliamentary majority, elected in his name, that enabled him to dominate the political situation. His victory in the 1965 presidential election – and no one doubted that he would be a candidate – seemed a foregone conclusion. For where was the opposition figure with sufficient stature to dare to challenge him? A possible figure was Pierre Mendès France whose moral prestige remained high on the Left and who published in October 1962 a synthesis of his political beliefs in *Pour une République moderne*. Yet the whole thesis of the book was to stress the author's irreconcilable opposition to the constitutional principles of the Fifth Republic. Mendès France had already come out against a directly elected president of the Republic. Now he advocated a system based on the primacy of parliament, whose authority would be counterbalanced by a legislature-long governmental contract backed by the right of dissolution and by an extension of grass-roots democracy. This amounted to a root-and-branch opposition to the principles of the regime as they had been established in 1958 and revised in 1962. Mendès France refused to betray his own values by participating in the new institutional arrangements and immediately made clear that he had no intention of seeking the top position through universal suffrage.

The leaders of the opposition parties who had come out against the 1962 reform appeared no more capable of standing in the 1965 election without losing face (and, moreover, with the certainty of losing). Thus at the end of 1962 the only possible analysis was that in the short term, the opposition had absolutely nothing with which to challenge de Gaulle. But did it thus follow that the latter had nothing to worry about? Only a few weeks after his 1962 election triumph an event occurred which showed that the answer to this question was no. The miners' strike precipitated an abrupt decline in de Gaulle's popularity; whereas until 1962 the index of those expressing satisfaction with de Gaulle generally remained above 60 per cent (as



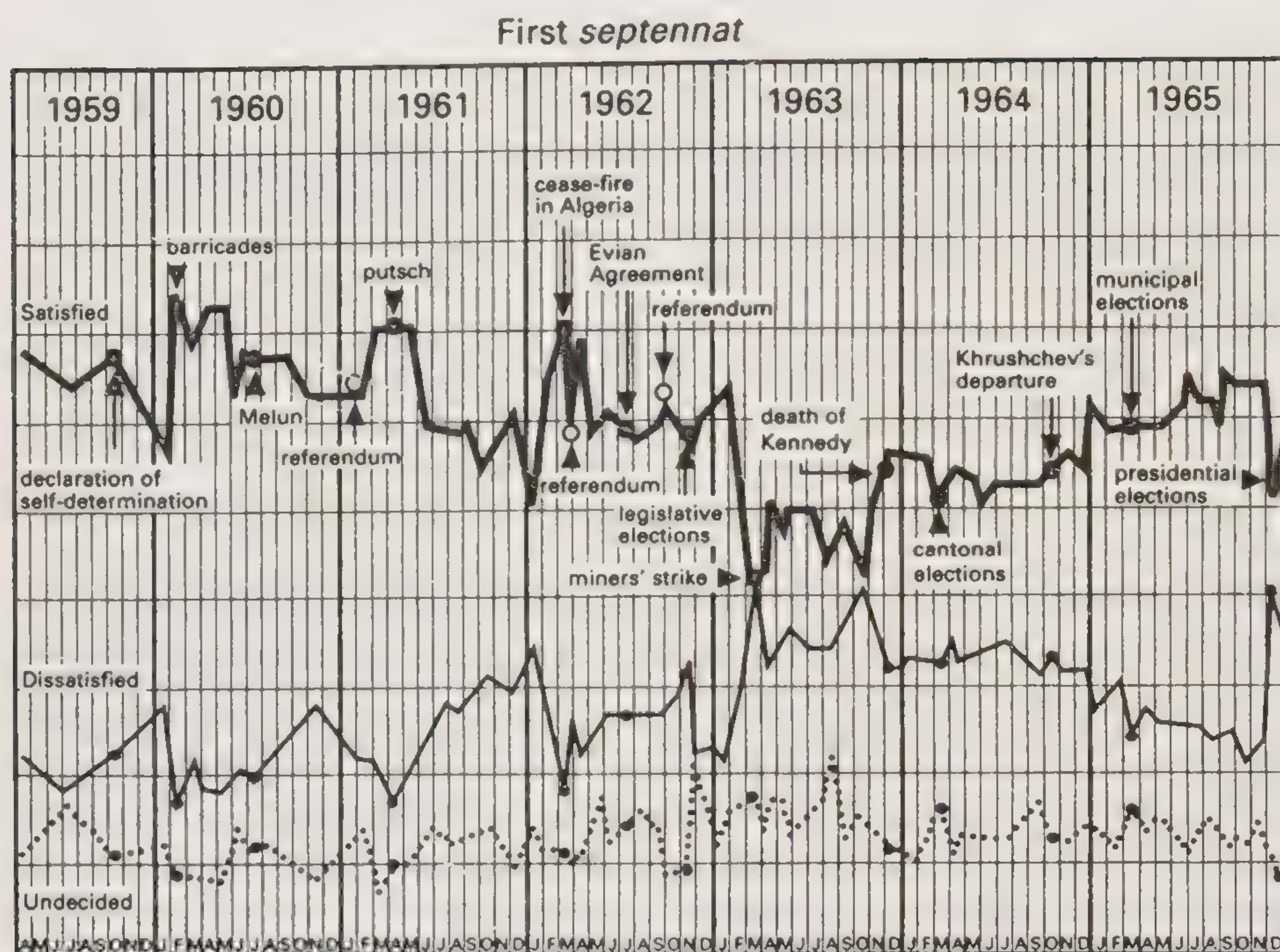


Figure 1 General de Gaulle's popularity

Source: IFOP, 'Sondages', *Les français et de Gaulle*, 1971, pp. 202-3.

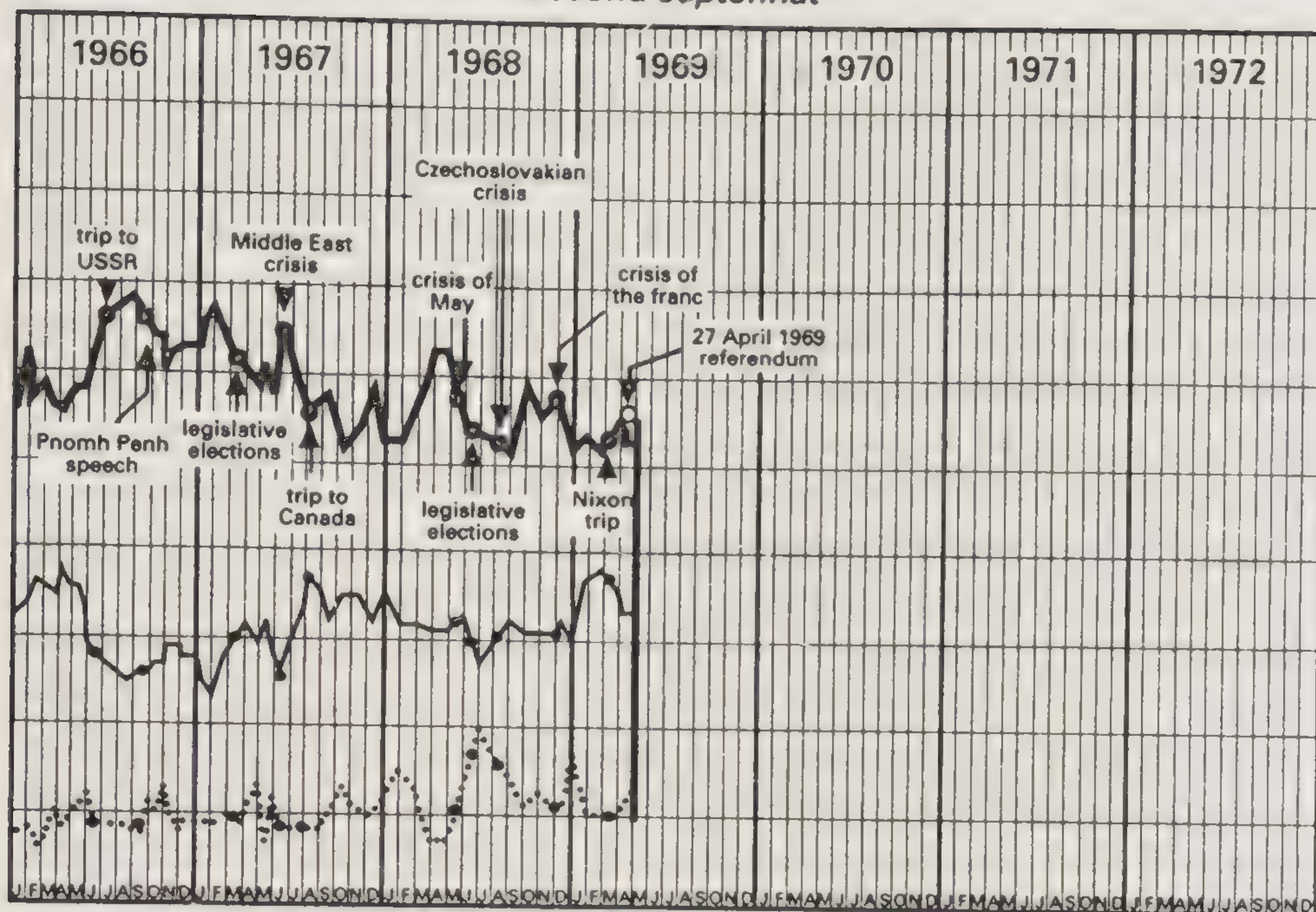
against 20-30 per cent expressing dissatisfaction), in March 1963 the number of discontented (42 per cent) overtook the satisfied (40 per cent). In April satisfied and dissatisfied each totalled 43 per cent. Thus it is clear that even though the opposition was incapable of seriously challenging the authority of de Gaulle, the latter was none the less vulnerable to the distance that separated his ambitions from those of the population. From 1963 onwards, as the realities of economic growth, social change and increased living standards took shape alongside de Gaulle's grand designs for foreign policy, a perceptible decline in political authority occurred which would lead to the imperceptible weakening of its foundations.

### *The slow decline of Gaullism in public opinion*

Opinion polls unquestionably showed that de Gaulle's popularity remained high throughout his presidency: once the crisis of spring 1963 was over the percentage of the satisfied rose above 50 and stayed there until 1969 (just before the referendum which would lead to his resignation, it stood at 53, against 33 per cent dissatisfied). De Gaulle's interventions in the various spheres of his action unquestionably provoked resentments which, for all their minority status, were not insignificant. Such discontent



## Second septennat



tended to focus on particular grievances and did not necessarily imply that those who expressed it wanted de Gaulle to relinquish power. Hence the dissatisfactions that certainly existed before 1962 were regarded by public opinion as secondary in importance to the resolution of the Algerian crisis.

After 1962, Gaullism benefited from the recollection of the successful end to the difficult problem of Algeria, but its chief assets lay in the institutional stability it provided, in its foreign policy and in its success in re-establishing order. (A 1965 poll showed that when asked what de Gaulle's greatest achievements had been since 1958, 27 per cent selected governmental stability; 14 per cent the end of the Algerian war; 13 per cent foreign policy; and 9 per cent re-establishment of order in France.) Yet a minority continued to give negative judgements on these same themes – 8 per cent considered that his greatest failure was Algeria; 6 per cent his foreign policy (and particularly his attitude towards the United States); and 4 per cent his authoritarianism. After 1962 governmental stability became the regime's principal asset. By contrast – and leaving aside the rancour engendered by the Algerian settlement – criticisms of its foreign, economic and social policies became the principal cause of the growing divorce between regime and public opinion.

We saw in the last chapter that the objectives of de Gaulle's foreign



policy always had the support of the majority of the French. Yet they also provoked quite considerable, albeit minority, opposition. The more de Gaulle's policy towards the United States hardened, the greater became the number of those registering disapproval: 15 per cent in May 1962; 17 per cent in January 1963; 21 per cent in September 1965; and 29 per cent in April 1966, by which time 27 per cent of the French disapproved of de Gaulle's policy towards NATO (as against 39 per cent who approved). In 1967, 28 per cent declared their hostility to de Gaulle's refusal of British membership of the Common Market (only 21 per cent had done so in 1963). There was thus a growing, albeit limited, opposition to the most intransigent aspects of de Gaulle's foreign policy. The gap that opened up over economic and financial questions was more serious, given that it was at once deeper and related to the daily life of the French people at a time when economic growth and increased living standards were an overwhelming priority in all the major industrial countries. When asked if the government's policies were capable of resolving the country's economic and financial problems, the French responded consistently with negative scepticism – four polls taken monthly between September and December 1963 showed that about 60 per cent of the French lacked confidence in the Stabilisation Plan, and only 25 per cent supported it. Dissatisfaction was equally great regarding governmental policy towards social questions. Between 1963 and 1969, more than 50 per cent expressed themselves dissatisfied as against an average of 30 per cent contented. It all seemed to suggest that the French were less impressed by the country's overall increase in living standards than by the unequal way in which the fruits of growth were shared out. There was ample proof for both phenomena. The idea that the increase in living standards went unnoticed is confirmed by an extraordinary series of opinion polls investigating perceptions of living standards and whether they had increased, declined or stayed stable. At most, 20 per cent of those questioned spoke of an increase. More usually the percentage was under 10 with between 80 and 90 per cent claiming that their living standards were the same as, or worse than, before. The facts did not support such an interpretation. But it is beyond doubt that this was the regime's Achilles' heel, and that a vague sense of social discontent was at the heart of the opposition to Gaullism expressed by sections of public opinion. In the run up to the 1965 election, survey evidence showed that in assessments of areas in which de Gaulle was judged to have performed least well since 1958, social issues predominated by a massive margin – wage freezes, price rises, declining living standards, discrimination against the workers, the lower classes, the small man and the farmers, excessive taxation, old-age poverty, inadequate social benefits, and so on. The judgement, though in some senses unjust, was an undoubted political fact. This hard core of social opposition, once complemented by the disapproval



of Gaullist foreign policy and the resentments linked to Algeria, was sufficient to undermine the authority of government and to counterbalance the weight of its achievements (governmental stability, international prestige, decolonisation). Yet a powerful counterweight to this dissatisfaction existed in the fear of the political unknown. To the extent that de Gaulle had no designated successor and the opposition no credible alternative solution, his Republic benefited from an advantageous situation that guaranteed its survival beyond the pivotal date of 1962. The opposition, for its part, was trying to find a way out of the disastrous period which it had endured between 1958 and 1962.

*The opposition tries a new start: the Defferre candidature*

The adoption by referendum of the direct election of the president and the collapse of the opposition parties had the effect of stimulating reflection on the new voting system and its implications and on how to establish party organisations that were better adapted to the new political conditions existing in France. The latter point has already been referred to in chapter 4, but was inseparable from the need felt by political reformers to integrate the presidential election system into their overall strategy. In this respect the initiative came from the new Left. Inspired by the American example – and in particular by the 1962 translation into French of Theodore White's account of the 1960 Kennedy campaign and victory, *The Making of the President* – the Club Jean Moulin proposed early in 1963 the idea of a 'convention' comprising delegates of the parties, trade unions and clubs to designate the opposition candidate. But the clubs were outflanked in September by the weekly *L'Express*, where Jean Ferniot sketched out the portrait of the ideal-type candidate 'Monsieur X'. Though naturally coming from the political class, 'Monsieur X' was to avoid all sectarianism, all demagoguery – perhaps even any ideology. He was to be a manager, in touch with economic realities and aware of scientific progress, in close contact with the leaders of labour, peasant and student organisations, and surrounded by competent technicians. This was a new conception of politics and one that actually responded to the aspirations expressed in December 1963 by the Club Jean Moulin, the Cercle Tocqueville, Démocratie nouvelle, and so on. From this ideal portrait – in which one can discern the profile of that French Kennedy for whom the opposition yearned – was expected to emerge a new dynamic that could unite the opposition around a credible presidential candidate. The strategy, by personalising the process of political reconstruction that everyone felt to be necessary, was hardly likely to appeal to political parties whose own realignments took the form, as we have seen, of timid agreements negotiated by party machines. This hiatus between the innovatory ambitions of



the clubs and the parties' unease about the presidential election explains the failure of the proposal launched in 1963. Once the face of Gaston Defferre appeared behind the highly transparent mask of 'Monsieur X', the harsh reality of how to graft reformism on to the traditional parties could not be avoided. Such a graft was the unambiguous goal of the mayor of Marseilles. His aim was to use the new rules of the presidential game – and at the same time to reshape the French party system.

To aid his presidential ambitions he surrounded himself with a small team of advisers headed by members of the Club Jean Moulin, under the journalist Georges Suffert, and the staff of *L'Express*, led by Jean Ferniot and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber. This core grouping was soon joined by representatives of those 'living forces' of the nation on whose support the candidate counted – members of the clubs, trade unionists who were preparing to transform the CFTC into the CFDT, young employers (José Bidegain), agricultural trade unionists (Michel Debatisse), and so on. Together they formed the Comité national Horizon 80 which created branches in the provinces, and in May 1965 published a programme in book form, *Un nouvel horizon*. Yet since Defferre realised that his candidature was bound to fail if he did not gain the backing of the traditional parties which structured public opinion (and he was, of course, a member of the Socialist Party), he attempted to gain their support. This attempt did not extend to the Communist Party with which he refused to negotiate and which was, as a result, strongly hostile to a candidature that would force it to put up its own standard-bearer even though the rules of the electoral game meant that he was bound to fail. Defferre's target was rather to achieve a federation of the remaining political parties. Hence he set out to win them over once he had obtained, in December 1963, the support of the SFIO. But he immediately came up against the resolute hostility of the PSU, the reluctance of the MRP, the radicals and the moderates, and even the reticence of the many socialist federations who wanted the parties to fix a programme before choosing a candidate. As a result, the Defferre candidature was to fall victim to the uncertainty of its objectives.

Defferre had tried at one and the same time to play the card of institutional and political modernisation – whose logic was the personalising of presidentialism and the use of the 'living forces' – while at the same time winning over the support of the political parties which the new system tended to marginalise. Playing both cards, he lost them both. The members of Horizon 80 became unhappy about a process that risked swallowing them up in political parties that they regarded as finished and, in any case, thoroughly untrustworthy. Very quickly they either quit, or else were forced out of the governing bodies of the clubs. After an initial period of interest, most trade unionists withdrew – the CGT following the line of the Communist Party, the CFDT and FEN being suspicious of active political



involvement. This falling-off during 1964 in the levels of 'new forces' support for Defferre's candidature led to a decline in its standing with public opinion.

When 1964 started, 24–5 per cent of the French said they were willing to vote for the mayor of Marseilles; by May the percentage had fallen to 13. His failure to mobilise public opinion then led Defferre to gamble on being able to rally the non-communist opposition parties. Thus in an April 1965 interview with *Le Monde*, he advocated the creation of a *Fédération démocrate et socialiste* that would bring together socialists, radicals, the MRP, moderates and members of the clubs. This union of the 'reformers' was also to be a failure owing to the refusal of the two best-organised parties – SFIO and MRP – to submerge their identity in a structure where they risked being drowned in a flood of new adherents. The failure that occurred on 18 June 1965 showed that opposition to Gaullism and an acknowledgement of their shared reformism were insufficient to make the political parties abandon the traditions they represented for a common unity. The MRP was unable to accept that the new federation should call itself socialist, that it should make reference to laicism, and that it should engage in dialogue with the Communist Party. Thus the Defferre candidature was unable to provide the opposition with the new stimulus that it needed. Abolishing old cleavages in the name of anti-Gaullism turned out to be premature – and possibly even insufficiently mobilising. The opposition had failed in its attempt to adapt to the new rules of the political game; at the beginning of summer 1965, the contours of the December presidential election were as unclear as ever.

### *New candidatures and a new political landscape*

By early summer 1965, two candidates had already declared their intention of standing for the election, neither of whom had the slightest chance of winning it. In November 1963, at a banquet held in Montbrison, the far-Right lawyer Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour announced that he would enter the fray with the aim of re-establishing a Right, smashed in 1962, by bringing together those who felt nostalgia for Vichy, for Poujadism and for French Algeria. Sections of the Right had no intention of linking up with such a compromising figure and, in the absence of the Pinay candidature that they would have loved, decided to choose a moderate, sensible candidate who would represent liberalism and moral values rather than a political programme. In April 1965 a national liberal convention, organised by Jean-Paul David, the general secretary of the *Parti libéral européen*, selected the Charente senator Pierre Marcilhacy. His presence isolated Tixier-Vignancour on the far Right, and he hoped to unite around him the moderate and centrist electorates so long as their traditional



parties – radicals, MRP, CNIP – backed him. Once they refused to do so the Marcilhacy candidature quickly ran into the ground. The last of these minor candidates, who sought to make a point and had no hope of winning, was Marcel Barbu. He managed to obtain the necessary hundred signatures and aimed to express the ‘anger and the indignation’ of the ordinary citizen.

The real contest took place, on the ruins of Defferre’s ‘grand federation’, between the SFIO and the MRP; for no one doubted that despite his silence, de Gaulle would be a candidate. On the Left the issue was dominated by Guy Mollet who rejected the notion that a socialist could be a candidate for the presidential election (the fear that such a candidate would become his rival for the control of the SFIO had already weighed heavily in the torpedoing of the Defferre candidature). As SFIO secretary general, Mollet preferred the candidature of Pinay or of Maurice Faure (who was also supported by the MRP). But the hesitations and prevarications of both men were to open the way to a third solution. On 9 September 1965, François Mitterrand declared that ‘de Gaulle and democracy were fundamentally incompatible’ and that he would be a candidate. From contacts he had established during the summer he was able to rely on the support not only of his own Convention des institutions républicaines, but also of the SFIO (the candidate was not a socialist and did not represent any organised party), of the Communist Party (while not entering into negotiations he ‘informed’ them of his decisions) and of Pierre Mendès France. Through the latter he was able to neutralise the PSU which in October finally came out in support of his candidature. A few days later, and after much hesitation, the Radical Party asked its supporters to vote for Mitterrand and chose in René Billières a more left-wing-minded president than Maurice Faure, whose sympathies lay with an alliance with the MRP. By the end of October, therefore, François Mitterrand appeared to be the sole candidate of the ‘Left’ (from the Centre-Left of the Radical Party to the extreme Left of the communists). His strategy was similar to that of Defferre in that it revolved round an individual rather than a party. But it was more sensitive to the opinions of the political parties, with which prior contacts had been established, and it differed also by including the communists and excluding the Right and Centre-Right. His ‘candidature of the Left’ was, moreover, paralleled by a coming together of the parties of the non-communist Left. On 10 September 1965, the Socialist and Radical parties and the Convention des institutions républicaines decided to form the *Fédération de la gauche démocrate et socialiste*.

Dragged with great reluctance into the Defferre initiative, both Christian Democrats and moderates were relieved by its failure in June 1965. Mitterrand was unacceptable to most of them because of his personality,



because of his past (he was a Leftist, a Mendesist and a bitter opponent of Gaullism) and because of the backing he received from the Communist Party. They placed their hopes in Antoine Pinay, whom they regarded as the only man capable of defeating de Gaulle. Yet the latter, pleased as he was to regard himself as a saviour figure for a crisis situation, was not keen on the idea of being defeated by de Gaulle. Thus Pinay allowed it to be known that he might be available in a crisis – but declared that he would not be a candidate (the polls indicated moreover that de Gaulle would easily beat him). After many attempts, the leaders of the Right and Centre-Right became convinced that the former Finance Minister would not allow his name to go forward and hence sought an alternative. They made contact successively with Emile Roche, president of the Economic and Social Council, with Louis Armand, the former president of French railways and Euratom, who regarded himself as an apolitical technician, and with Pierre Sudreau, de Gaulle's former minister who had resigned in October 1962 out of opposition to the election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage. On 19 October 1965, however, their choice finally settled on Jean Lecanuet, who claimed to be a 'democratic, social and European' candidate. The three adjectives were intended to form the basis of his attack on de Gaulle, who was implicitly accused of being authoritarian, indifferent to social problems and excessively nationalist in his conception of Europe. Supported by the MRP, the moderates and a number of radicals, Lecanuet's principal stress lay in his image of youth and modernity; like Defferre before him he sought to be the 'French Kennedy'.

The last candidate to declare was of course de Gaulle himself who waited until 4 November to reveal his intention, an intention which nobody had in fact doubted. The radio and television speech in which he announced his candidature immediately dramatised what was at stake in the election. We have seen from the opinion polls that the French regarded governmental stability as the principal reason for their satisfaction with the Fifth Republic. Hence it was the maintenance of this stability which de Gaulle made the fundamental issue of the campaign. 'If the full-hearted and massive support of the people determines my continuation in office, no one can doubt that the future of the Republic is assured. If it does not, no one can doubt that the Republic will collapse and that France will once again suffer – but this time without any remedy – a chaos within the State even more disastrous than in the past.' The opposition claimed that this was a message of 'me or chaos' and that it falsified the election issue by brandishing the threat of a crisis of the regime. Yet it is clear that this was indeed a decisive argument.

The contours of the election were thus established a month before it took place. Behind the contest of the three major players – de Gaulle, Mitter-



and, Lecanuet -- could be seen the reordering of the political landscape into four principal groups, each of which organised around one of the three candidates. Gaullism supported its creator, the two parts of the Left -- communist and non-communist -- backed Mitterrand, and the Right and Centre identified with Lecanuet.

### *The electoral campaign and political innovation*

As the first election of the president of the Republic by universal suffrage, the vote of 12 December 1965 appealed to the French by its very novelty. Its principal interest, however, lay in the fact that it had all the characteristics of a modern election since for the first time in French history, television enabled the candidates to reach virtually the entire population while the generalised use of opinion polls (again for the first time) enabled the electorate to have a day by day picture of how its voting intentions were evolving.

At the beginning the electoral campaign looked to contain no surprises. The first poll carried out by IFOP (between 22 October and 5 November 1965 -- and thus before the announcement of de Gaulle's candidature) forecast an easy victory for de Gaulle on round one, with 66 per cent of the votes, to Mitterrand's 23 and Lecanuet's 5 (the same percentage as Tixier-Vignancour). It thus looked as if the only significance of the election for the opposition candidates was as a declaration of their beliefs. The conclusion appeared so foregone that de Gaulle, who had little taste for electioneering, decided not to use the airtime accorded to him by television. But the appearance on screen of opposition leaders who were normally kept off it had dramatic effects. In the first place this was because television viewers, who were accustomed to hear journalists repeating ministerial platitudes, proved to be very receptive to the criticisms of government and president expressed by opposition candidates, and all the more so in that they were so unusual. Secondly, the appearance on screen of youthful -- and eloquent and convincing -- figures like Mitterrand (aged forty-nine) and Lecanuet (aged forty-five) was attractive to many electors. They offered a cruel contrast to de Gaulle (who was seventy-five) and to his by now heavily exposed ideas. The poster campaigns of the two principal opposition candidates naturally insisted on the youth theme -- 'A young president for a modern France', 'France is now on the move', 'For a new France'. Each of the candidates stressed the themes which would mobilise his electorate -- social justice for Mitterrand, Europe for Lecanuet. But it was their television image which had the greatest impact on public opinion. The power of Mitterrand's conviction and of Lecanuet's smile sent the initial forecasts spinning.

The widespread use of opinion polls enables us to follow the impact of the



Table 20. *Evolution of voting intentions during the first round of the 1965 presidential campaign*

	Pre-election polls				
	22 October– 5 November	6–16 November	17–27 November	1–2 December	5 December election
De Gaulle	66	61	46.5	43	43.7
Mitterrand	23	24	28	27	32.2
Lecanuet	5	7	14	20	15.9
Tixier-Vignancour	5	7	7	7	5.3
Marcilhacy	1	1	3	2	1.7
Barbu	–	–	1.5	1	1.2
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

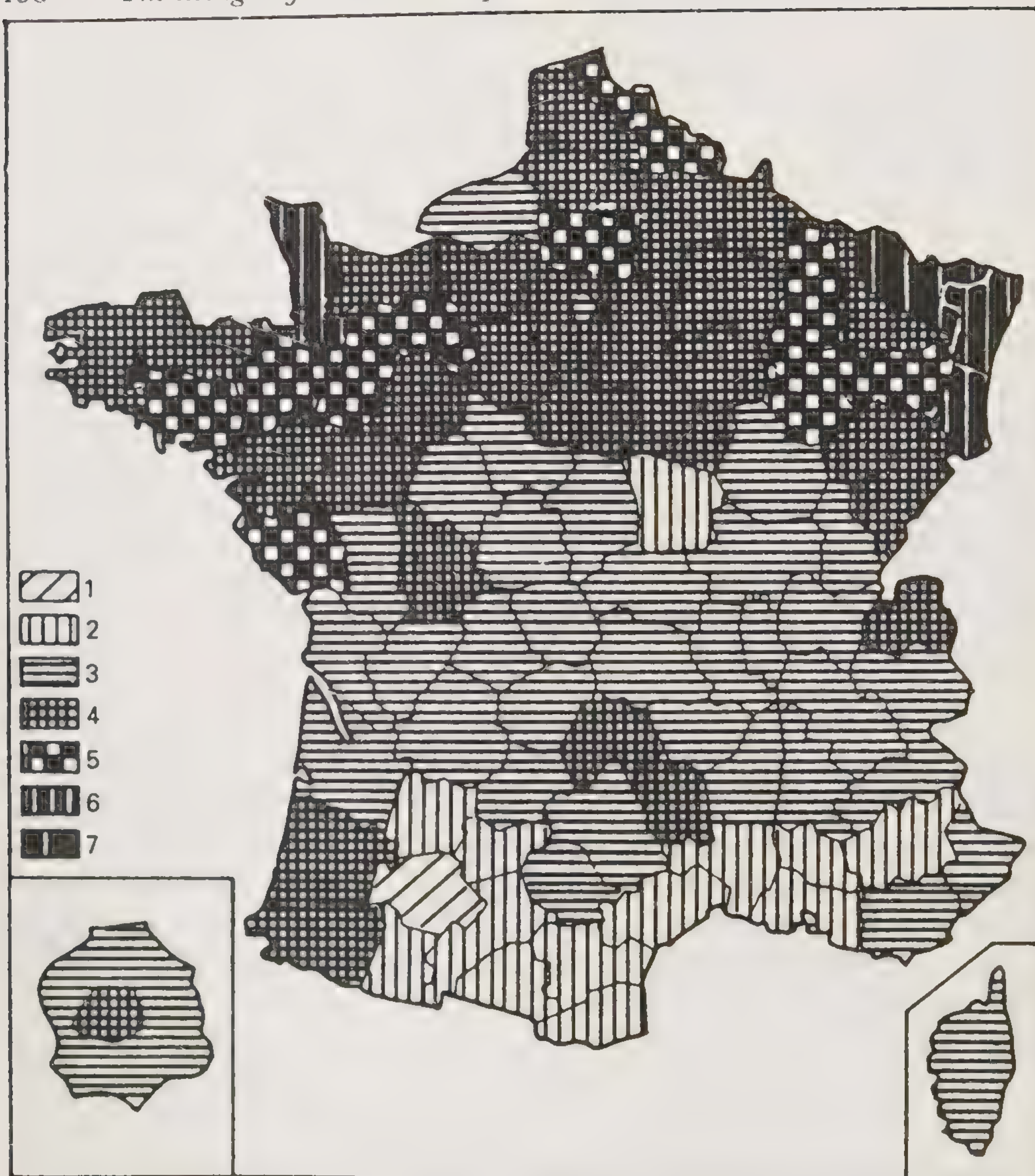
Source: IFOP (33), p. 228.

presidential campaign. Naturally the polls provided a series of snapshots of public opinion; but their publication had its own impact. The evolving tendencies they revealed had a knock-on effect on voter intentions, and thereby reinforced the shifts they were observing. The major evolution was clear – a remorseless increase in support for the two main opposition candidates. Mitterrand's score rose within a month from 23 per cent to 27 per cent of voting intentions, and Lecanuet's advance was spectacular. He rose from 5 per cent at the beginning of November to 20 per cent a month later. Given that Lecanuet was mainly fishing in the same electoral waters as de Gaulle, the inevitable result of his advance was a decline in the number of votes on which the latter could depend. By mid-November, polls showed that de Gaulle's support had fallen below 50 per cent – the second round which had seemed unthinkable a month earlier now became a real possibility.

Given these circumstances the first-round results, which confirmed the pollsters' forecasts, did not constitute as major surprise. In an election in which 85 per cent of the French people participated, de Gaulle did no better than the polls had indicated and obtained 43 per cent of the vote. He was thus forced into a second-round run-off. Jean Lecanuet, who was chiefly responsible for the outcome, was somewhat disappointed to get only 15.9 per cent of the total, 4 per cent less than the polls had predicted. François Mitterrand, by contrast, did extremely well. The 32.2 per cent he won was 5 per cent above the poll forecasts and made him the opposition candidate against the head of state for round two.

The first round results contain their own paradoxes. For de Gaulle the





Map 6 Votes for de Gaulle, 5 December 1965

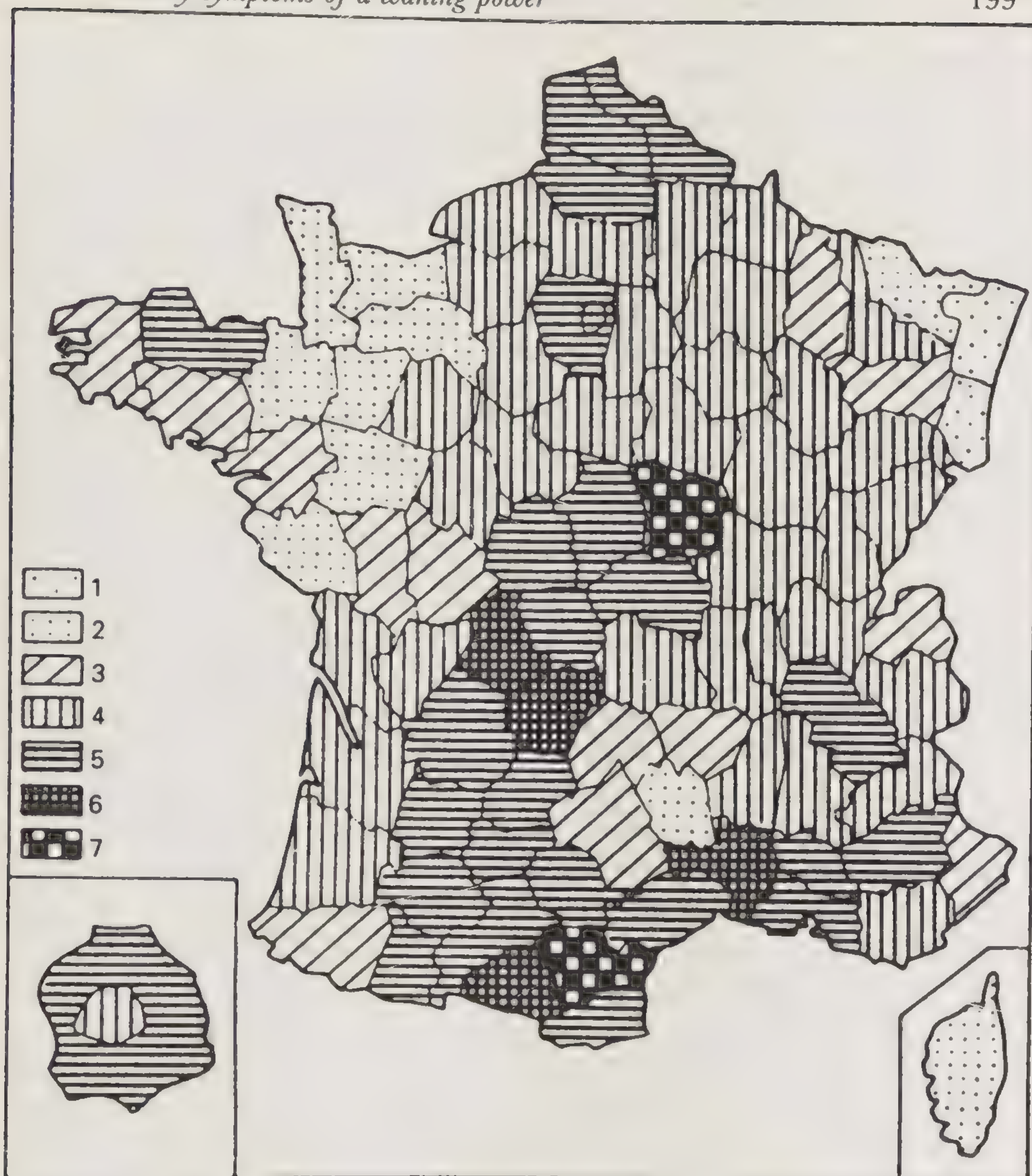
Percentage of electorate

(1) 18-23.9 (2) 24-29.9 (3) 30-35.9 (4) 36-41.9 (5) 42-47.9  
(6) 48-53.9 (7) 54-59.9

Source: F. Goguel, *Chroniques électorales*, Presses de la FNSP, 1983, vol. II, p. 390

disappointment was obvious. No one had seriously imagined that the legendary figure who governed France and who was expecting to be effortlessly re-elected would suffer the humiliation of a second round and be obliged to go wooing the electorate. Hence his result was generally interpreted as the sign of a certain decline in Gaullism's public appeal. The electors were thought to be suffering from a latent disquiet and to have wanted to give a clear warning to the imperious master who had ruled for over seven years.





Map 7 Votes for Mitterrand, 5 December 1965

Percentage of electorate

(1) 6–11.9 (2) 12–17.9 (3) 18–23.9 (4) 24–29.9 (5) 30–35.9  
(6) 36–41.9 (7) 42–44.3Source: F. Goguel, *Chroniques électorales*, Presses de la FNSP, 1983, vol. II, p. 391

For the opposition, by contrast, the results appeared at once spectacular and unexpected. A Left which had been vanquished in 1958 and had subsequently appeared incapable of finding a champion with whom to oppose de Gaulle, did better than expected and saw its candidate become the opposition's candidate for the second round. Meanwhile the opposition centrists had found in Jean Lecanuet a unifying candidate who proved by the electoral breakthrough he achieved that he was capable of turning a disorganised political tendency into a real political force.



Table 21. *Presidential election of 5 December 1965: first round*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	28,223,167	100	
Votes	24,001,961		
Abstentions	4,231,206	14.9	
Spoilt papers	244,292	0.8	
de Gaulle	10,386,734	36.7	43.7
Mitterrand	7,658,792	27.1	32.2
Lecanuet	3,767,404	13.3	15.8
Tixier-Vignancour	1,253,958	4.4	5.2
Marcilhacy	413,129	1.4	1.7
Barbu	277,652	0.9	1.1

A more detached analysis of the results (when compared for example with the legislative elections of 1962) would certainly modify these initial impressions. De Gaulle, after all, gained seven percentage points more than the combined 1962 result of the UNR and independent republicans; he won an absolute majority of votes cast in thirteen departments (notably the traditional right-wing bastions in Eastern and Western France) and came top of the poll in seventy more, thereby establishing a veritable hegemony in Northern France, where the Left was crushed. Mitterrand's 32.2 per cent was, for its part, twelve points lower than that gained in 1962 by the parties who now supported him. Only Lecanuet performed better than his supporters – the MRP and moderates opposed to de Gaulle – had done four years earlier. Even here the total MRP and independent vote in 1962 was 18.5 per cent. None of this mattered. Once de Gaulle had turned the presidential election into a contest of personalities rather than parties he was bound to appear, despite the evidence, as the clear loser of round one. It was evident that he was going to have to work to convince his fellow citizens on round two and so avoid an unpleasant surprise at the hands of

Table 22. *Presidential election of 19 December 1965: second round*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	28,223,198	100	
Votes	23,862,653		
Abstentions	4,360,545	15.4	
Spoilt papers	665,141	2.3	
de Gaulle	12,643,527	44.7	54.5
Mitterrand	10,553,985	37.3	45.5



an adversary whose inherent combativeness was reinforced by results which made him the champion of the opposition cause.

Electoral law stipulated that only the top two candidates on the first round could go through to the second. De Gaulle and Mitterrand thus became the protagonists in the decisive contest. The contest, it should be stressed, was not decided in advance and, on paper at least, de Gaulle was a potential loser given that the four candidates eliminated on round one all effectively came out in favour of his opponent, Barbu and Tixier-Vignancour doing so explicitly and Marcilhacy and Lecanuet inviting the electorate not to vote for the incumbent president. Obligated to campaign actively, de Gaulle did so with great skill by giving three television interviews to the journalist Michel Droit in which he defended the various policies he had carried out since 1958 while showing himself to be a less Olympian figure than in his speeches and press conferences and one closer to the everyday concerns of the French people. Mitterrand for his part based his campaign on unity; he stressed the themes that were capable of bringing together the electorates of the candidates eliminated on round one by presenting himself as the candidate of 'all the republicans' and as the resolute opponent of Gaullism.

The result, which had been predicted by the opinion polls, was not a surprise. On 19 December an electorate that was almost as large as that for round one gave de Gaulle 54.5 per cent of the vote to Mitterrand's 45.5 per cent.

Analysis of the votes shows that the 2,260,000 votes gained by de Gaulle between the two rounds came chiefly from the electorate of the opposition centrists: by preferring de Gaulle to the candidate of the united Left, Lecanuet's voters swung the contest decisively in favour of the incumbent president. The future political home of this electorate thus became one of the decisive issues in French politics. Would it become, as its leaders and, in particular Lecanuet, hoped, an autonomous force able to influence national political decisions? or would it simply be a political prize fought over by Gaullism and the Left in their search for a stable majority?

Whatever the answer to that question might be, the presidential election of 1965 marks a fundamental turning-point in the history of de Gaulle's Republic. As the first major national election not to be overshadowed by the looming presence of the Algerian conflict, it unquestionably confirmed the political authority of de Gaulle who emerged from it as the clear winner. At the same time, however, the fact that victory had been obtained on the second round after a difficult campaign meant that de Gaulle's prestige had been shaken. He had been challenged; he had had to descend from the Olympian heights in which he felt at home in order to speak not only of institutions or of world strategy, but also of the everyday concerns of the French people. The de Gaulle who now embarked on his



second seven-year term ceased to be the exceptional figure which he had been since his return to power in 1958, and the electors (or at least 45 per cent of them) had signalled their dissatisfaction with an economic and social policy of which they disapproved and with an arrogant political style that did not correspond to their conception of democracy. The counterpart to this weakening of the president was the strengthening of the opposition. After its annihilation in 1962, it now recovered a degree of credibility, having managed through its unity to gain almost half the electorate. Whereas only a few weeks before the election it had lacked a leader capable of mobilising the voters, it now found itself provided with two front-rank figures who had shown their mettle, overcome the party machines, and consolidated their image as leaders capable of unifying the political forces they championed. Though defeated by de Gaulle, Mitterrand and Lecanuet were the principal beneficiaries of the first elections for the presidency to be held under universal suffrage. The result of this was that 1965 appeared to have solved nothing given that a 'third round' of the combat between Gaullism and opposition was already looming on the horizon in the shape of the legislative elections scheduled for 1967.

### *The long march to 1967*

Preparations for the 1967 legislative elections began as soon as the 1965 presidential contest was over. The majority sought to digest the implications of the fact that de Gaulle had been forced to go to a second round, and of its underestimation of the opposition that had been at the cause of the 5 December disappointment. Though Georges Pompidou was, in line with public opinion expectations, reappointed prime minister, his government was remodelled to take account of the criticisms of its social and economic policy. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the Minister of the Economy and Finance, was held responsible for de Gaulle's relative defeat because he had delayed too long in implementing the Stabilisation Plan, and had then held on to it too long. He lost his portfolio and chose to leave the government rather than accept what he regarded as the inferior post of Minister of Public Works. The political consequences of Giscard's removal proved to be considerable; as leader of the independent republicans he applied himself henceforth to consolidating the autonomous existence of his group and did not feel bound by the constraints of ministerial solidarity. His successor at Economy and Finance was the much more dirigist and reform-minded Michel Debré, who had proved to be a highly effective asset to de Gaulle in the public debate with Pierre Mendès France which was one of the high points of the election campaign. Equally significant were the entries into the government of Edgar Faure and Jean-Marcel Jeanneney. The former took over the Ministry of Agriculture with the task



of reassuring a peasant electorate that had been dismayed by Pisani's reforms and had shown its displeasure by voting massively for Lecanuet; the latter went to a super ministry of Social Affairs. Though these were significant gestures they did not produce any real political changes apart from the December 1966 law on professional training and social advancement, a measure which testified to the new government's desire to realise the Third Republic's old dream of social integration via social advancement. Yet the government had no intention, so far as social change was concerned, of moving beyond advancement via training. Thus the left-wing Gaullists' traditional idea of associating capital and labour through the participation of wage-earners in companies' share capital was effectively buried in October 1966. In July 1965, the National Assembly had voted the 'Valion amendment' whose aim was to guarantee the 'rights of workers in the increase of self-generated company assets'. The text, however, was viewed with suspicion by the trade unions, and with hostility by the employers and the civil service. Debré's reserve, and Pompidou's scepticism, led de Gaulle, in his press conference of 28 October 1966, to approve the principle – but to adjourn its application.

De Gaulle's second term began with gestures in the direction of social concern which nevertheless bore little fruit and were manifestly the product of the lessons of the presidential election. So far as foreign policy was concerned there was absolutely no sign of any softening on positions. His second presidency witnessed a stiffening of earlier positions and took no account whatsoever of the criticisms made in this domain by the Left or the opposition Centrists. France forced her five European partners to accept the 'Luxembourg compromise'; withdrew from NATO's integrated command structure; and inaugurated the series of nuclear tests at Mururoa. De Gaulle behaved towards the United States with an independence that verged on the provocative by visiting Moscow in June 1966 and making the Phnom Penh speech the following September. Here was a president in no sense weakened by the challenge of December 1965, but one who was as imperious and self-confident as ever.

The same combative spirit was evident in the preparations for the 1967 elections. Georges Pompidou, who now held the title of leader of the majority, was determined to cut Giscard d'Estaing's desire for autonomy down to size. On 1 June 1966 Giscard created the *Fédération nationale des républicains-indépendants* which sought to annex part of the programme of the opposition Centrists by defining itself as 'liberal, centrist and European'. Yet Pompidou had already spelled out a month earlier the permitted limits of any dissidence within the majority by imposing the strategy of a single majority candidate in every constituency and by creating an 'Action Committee for the Fifth Republic' whose task it was to allocate candidatures. Giscard's margin of manoeuvre was correspondingly



reduced; all he could do was to make small gestures designed to preserve the independence of his group. One example of this was his press conference of 10 January 1967 when, in the course of defining the independent republicans' attitude to the majority, he coined the famous phrase 'Yes, but . . .' – 'yes' to the majority, 'but' with the firm intention of 'influencing its choices'.

The same concern to be fully prepared for the 1967 elections was evident on the Left. Following the 1965 election, Mitterrand devoted his energies to strengthening the cohesiveness of the *Fédération de la gauche démocratique et socialiste* that had been created in September to support his candidature by bringing together socialists, radicals and members of the *Convention des institutions républicaines*. Despite the rivalries that affected the relationship between the three formations, he managed to impose the principle of a single federation candidate in each constituency for the 1967 election. The same principle lay behind Mitterrand's decision of May 1966 to create a form of 'counter government', based on the British model of the shadow cabinet. The initiative was unfortunate in that in order to bind the various groupings within the federation together, he appointed their leaders in charge of the portfolios of this 'counter government'; some of them, like Guy Mollet, looked like products of the Fourth Republic, while others were completely unknown technocrats. This very fact disappointed those on the Left who wanted the creation of a genuinely new movement. The archaic nature of the move was further highlighted when, at the same time (May 1966), the PSU organised the Grenoble colloquium at which the Club Jean Moulin, trade unionists and intellectuals debated a new programme for the opposition adapted to the realities of growth.

Yet after the counter government blunder, a series of developments demonstrated the extent to which the federation had become the principal force of the non-communist Left – the adoption of a programme setting out its choices as regards institutional, economic, social and foreign policy, and the signature of a second-ballot pact with the Communist Party. The federation's centrality was further underlined when the PSU, which had hitherto held itself aloof from 'low politics', decided in January 1967 to join the electoral pact which the FGDS and the Communist Party had signed. The federation also declared its readiness – unlike the PCF and PSU – to help the election, in constituencies where the Left had no hope of success, of Centrist candidates opposed to 'personal power'.

The political forces that had backed Lecanuet also decided at this time to institutionalise their alliance. Immediately after the first round of the presidential election Lecanuet proposed the formation of a *Centre démocrate*. The latter was officially launched on 2 February 1966, and brought together the MRP, the CNIP and a number of radicals led by Maurice



Faure (the latter were compelled by their party, a member of the FGDS, to withdraw). Thus the Centre démocrate looked to be firmly anchored in the Centre-Right, with the mission of structuring the current of public opinion that had flowed in Lecanuet's direction in December 1965. Its strategy aimed less at ousting Gaullism than at applying pressure to force it to take account of the views of a political formation which, like the hinge parties of the Third and Fourth Republics, would become indispensable to the formation of a parliamentary majority. The tactic of the Centre démocrate was in many ways similar to that of the independent republicans, and we have already noted the similarity of their programmes. The only real difference was that one group worked within the majority while the other was – for the moment – outside it.

*The 1967 elections: new disappointments for the majority*

Although both the Gaullists and the opposition prepared with considerable – and equal – care for the parliamentary elections of 1967, neither they nor public opinion expected any great surprises. The inevitable ruminations on the consequences of a possible defeat for the Gaullist majority that would negate the 1965 verdict were regarded as purely academic speculation. Poll forecasters gave 37–8 per cent of the vote to the Gaullists, 21–4 per cent to the communists, 20–3 per cent to the FGDS and 14 per cent to the Centre démocrate, predictions which, however, analysed, gave a clear victory to the Action Committee for the Fifth Republic. Moreover, Georges Pompidou ran a skilful and dynamic campaign, closely supervising the cohesion of the majority and not sparing his own participation, as in the two major debates he held – with Mitterrand at Nevers on 22 February, and with Mendès France at Grenoble five days later. Even de Gaulle, having realised the damage caused by his excessive reserve in the first round of the presidential election, threw his weight into the balance. On 9 February he appeared on television to warn the French against 'three oppositions, united to destroy ... and incapable of constructing'. He repeated his warning on 4 March, just before round one, thereby provoking a controversy over the constitutional principle of the president as arbiter; the principle of equal airtime for majority and opposition; and the prohibition of any electoral propaganda after the closure of the campaign.

The result of the first round, held on 5 March, revealed a very high turnout (more than 80 per cent of the registered voters) and a high degree of electoral stability.

The first lesson of the 1967 election was that Gaullism was tightening its hold on public opinion. It is true that the independent republicans and a certain number of moderates had thrown in their lot with the UNR-UDT under the umbrella of the Action Committee for the Fifth Republic; but



Table 23. *Legislative elections of 5 March 1967: first round*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	28,291,838	100	
Votes	22,977,151		
Abstentions	5,404,687	19.1	
Spoilt papers	494,834	1.7	
PCF	5,029,808	17.7	22.4
Extreme Left	506,592	1.7	2.2
FGDS	4,207,166	14.8	18.7
Action Committee for the Fifth Republic (Gaullists)	8,453,512	29.8	37.7
Dissident Gaullists	104,544	0.3	0.4
Democratic Centre	3,107,447	10.6	13.4
Others	878,472	3.1	3.9
Extreme Right	194,776	0.6	0.8

even after taking this into account, Gaullism progressed to reach 37.7 per cent of the total vote, a new record. It is of course no less true that although Gaullism was the largest French faction, it did not enjoy a majority position over the totality of the forces opposed to it.

Analyses of the opposition vote vary, depending on whether one is talking of the Left, the opposition Centre or the Right. The Left, and notably the communists, made some slight progress. The PCF had emerged out of its political ghetto and loyally played the electoral game by agreeing to sign second-round pacts with the FGDS and PSU; its 1962 vote was up, fractionally, by 0.7 per cent, and it did particularly well in working-class areas that had suffered from the Stabilisation Plan (Lorraine and the Doubs). The FGDS, by contrast, had manifestly failed to arouse the voters' enthusiasm, and did not achieve the electoral take-off which Mitterrand expected. The 18.7 per cent of the vote it received was no more than the sum total gained by its component parts in 1962. The extreme right, crushed in 1962, made no recovery, but the real loser in an otherwise stable set of results was the Centre démocrate. Its 13.4 per cent of the vote was below the result obtained by Lecanuet in the 1965 presidential election, and demonstrated its failure to realise the advance that might have made it the arbiter of French party politics.

Thus the profound stability of the first-round results was a disappointment to the opponents of Gaullism who had hoped to capitalise on the achievements of their leaders in 1965. French politics appeared stuck in a rut.

To general astonishment, the second round produced the shock that the first round had appeared to render impossible. Instead of the new electoral



Table 24. *Legislative elections of 5 and 12 March 1967: outcome in seats*

Majority		Opposition	Comparison with 1962
UDV (Gaullists)	200		-33
Independent Republicans	44		+9
		PCF	73
		FGDS	121
		PDM	44
	Independents		8
			-5

triumph which it could have expected after the first-round vote (and which opinion polls predicted), the majority came very close to losing its overall control of the National Assembly. The Gaullists won only 233 of the 470 mainland seats; and their narrow overall victory (247 seats as against the opposition's 240) was due to the overseas vote.

How is this knife-edged result, one that for a few hours raised the spectre of a regime crisis in France, to be explained? One reason is that the Gaullists had won less than 38 per cent of the vote on round one and that in many constituencies the margin between majority and opposition was relatively narrow. Given these circumstances, the stability of the first-round vote seemed to suggest that the second-round result was a foregone conclusion; and this in turn led to a degree of demobilisation, particularly amongst Centrist voters who only voted for the majority on the second, decisive round when the regime looked to be in crisis. Secondly, the electoral pact between socialists and communists worked extremely well, better even than expected in that a number of communist candidates who came top in round one stood down for a FGDS candidate when they considered that the latter had a better chance of winning the second round. A third factor was that fear of an overwhelming Gaullist victory led some Centrist electors to vote for the opposition as a form of risk-free warning to de Gaulle and his supporters. The result was unexpected: if opposition Centrism was the great loser, the narrowly defeated Left was the great winner, given that the communists increased their parliamentary representation from 41 to 73 while the number of non-communist-Left deputies rose from 105 to 121 (76 socialists, 24 radicals, 16 members of the Convention of Republican Institutions and 5 'Left independents').

After the disappointments of the presidential election, and despite its first-round vote, the majority had narrowly avoided a historic defeat and a regime crisis. The consequences were to weigh heavily on the political climate of 1967-8.



*A darkening political climate*

The two electoral disappointments suffered by the majority in 1965 and 1967 led to the widespread sense of a weakened power that was henceforth vulnerable to any sudden crisis. Pierre Mendès France gave expression to this feeling when he declared on election night that the second round did not mark the end of the conflict between the Fifth Republic and its opponents and that the legislature would not go to the end of its term. The opposition was encouraged by the evidence of governmental fragility to accentuate its attacks. In parliament it showed its combativeness by conducting a bitter offensive against the ordinances introduced by the government as emergency measures to deal with social and economic questions. Three successive censure motions introduced by the opposition on 20 May and 9 and 16 June were only narrowly defeated. Moreover, the recourse to the ordinance procedure, which appeared to deprive a newly elected parliament of its rights, provoked tension within the government itself and led to the resignation of Edgard Pisani. At the same time, the trade unions stepped up their opposition to Gaullism's social policy and organised strikes and demonstrations, whose unquestionable success demonstrated, like the elections, just how discontented public opinion had become. Sensing that the government was in difficulty, and further encouraged by its successes in the autumn 1967 cantonal elections, the Left redoubled its efforts to destabilise it and to improve its own internal organisation. Mitterrand's attempts to realise a complete union of the three political families that comprised the FGDS looked to be on the point of success when, on 29 February 1968, after laborious negotiations on the relative weight of each party in its governing bodies, the Executive Committee and Political Bureau of the federation met to elect its 1965 candidate to the presidency of the organisation. The PSU refused to join the federation, which now entered into discussions with the Communist Party about the basis of a possible common programme; in March 1968 the two groups drew up a preliminary balance sheet of areas of agreement and disagreement.

If the Left appeared capable of organising itself, the opposition Centrists seemed condemned to division and impotence. In order to be able to form a parliamentary group – entitled Progress and Modern Democracy – the representatives of the Centre démocrate were obliged to reach agreement with other centrists who diverged little from the majority. Tensions emerged between those centrists who, like Lecanuet and Pierre Abelin (respectively president and general secretary of Centre démocrate), were determined adversaries of Gaullism, and a governmentalist fraction tempted by the idea of linking up with the majority and headed by Jacques Duhamel (the president of the parliamentary group) and Joseph Fontanet.

Last – and above all – de Gaulle himself contributed to the darkening



political climate by affecting to dismiss the election results as an essentially unimportant event which had no bearing on essentials. He displayed an ostentatious contempt for the new deputies by deciding to deprive them of their law-making role through the use of ordinances. He kept Couve de Murville and Messmer in their ministerial posts (Foreign Affairs and Armed Forces) despite their electoral defeats. And above all he showed in his foreign policy decisions of 1967 that he took no account whatsoever of the views of the political nation – including those of the majority. Thus it was that in June 1967, following the Six Day War, he condemned Israeli aggression and decided on an arms embargo in the Middle East, and in July he uttered in Quebec the remark ‘Long live free Quebec’, thereby provoking a diplomatic incident with Canada, thanks to his public espousal of the cause of the separatist minority. The press conference of November 1967 became the occasion for him to speak to Israel as ‘an élite nation, self-confident and domineering’, and to issue a new veto on Britain’s entry into the Common Market. These policy decisions, announced without any prior discussion inside the majority, created a deep-seated malaise that Giscard d’Estaing articulated on 17 August 1967 when he spoke of the ‘solitary exercise of power’.

It is evident that a period that had opened with the triumphant victory of the majority in 1962 was by 1967 showing clear evidence of a weakening of Gaullist authority. Whereas the opposition, buoyed up by the elections of 1965 and 1967, had the wind in its sails, the majority was losing its grip and falling prey to internal divisions as a result of its failing dynamism and the unease provoked by de Gaulle’s use of power. In November 1967, Pompidou attempted to regain the political initiative by reorganising the majority’s principal grouping. At the Lille conference, the UNR was transformed into the Union of Democrats for the Fifth Republic (UDV<sup>e</sup>), and the ruling personnel of historic Gaullism were replaced by a new generation that, like Pompidou, frequently came from the RPF and owed its promotion to his support. The real reason for this reorganisation lay in the fact that Gaullism was henceforth on the defensive and that de Gaulle’s Republic now looked vulnerable at any moment to the sort of event that would transform decline into defeat. Such an outcome had nearly occurred in 1965 and 1967; with the 1968 crisis it did. In its origins, 1968 owed nothing to conventional politics. Yet it merged with the existing political forces to present a major challenge to a regime that was already in difficulties.



## The crisis of 1968

The contemporary historian, working with established facts whose logic he attempts to understand, can with hindsight make out the geological faults in French society of the 1960s which produced the earthquake that struck the country in May and June 1968. But at the time none of these faults was obvious to contemporaries. The manifest gap separating the aspirations of the French people from the actions of its leaders helps us to understand the electoral failures of Gaullism in 1965 and 1967; but it is quite inadequate as an explanation of the ferocity of the crisis which struck France and so profoundly shook the regime. It is difficult not to share the total bewilderment expressed by three sociologists who sought to come to grips with the unfolding events. 'Revolution looked highly improbable at the end of April. With stability achieved, the authority of government appeared stronger and more assured than it had done for a century; the economy was expanding thanks to a process of growth which for all its hiccups seemed unending; the standard of living of wage-earners was slowly increasing despite the meagre dividend that they received from the improvement in productivity; inflation was under control and the currency strong. The political opposition had accepted the rules of the electoral and parliamentary game, and the mass of the population seemed indifferent to politics except at elections. Their aspirations, tastes and behaviour appeared to reflect a shared – and cross-class – set of values which were themselves the product of the multifarious pressures that together create modernity' (C. Lefort in E. Morin, C. Lefort and C. Castoriadis, 'La Brèche: premières réflexions sur les événements' (Paris, Fayard, 1969; reprinted 1988 as *Mai 68: la brèche, suivi de vingt ans après*).

The truth of the matter is that if the fault-lines that emerged in May were invisible, it is because they were unrelated to those social and political phenomena on which everyday attention concentrated. Their real origins lay in much more fundamental elements of collective social consciousness, elements which challenged the whole basis of the reconstruction of post-war France as well as the new values adopted in the period of growth. 1968 was thus in essence a moral and cultural crisis which sprang from the



lack of symmetry between the traditional nineteenth-century values which continued to structure the organisation and behaviour of French society, and the new realities which growth and consumption patterns had introduced in the last ten years. The crisis exploded onto the political landscape simply because governmental authority was more damaged by the two challenges of 1965 and 1967 than it realised, and because political discourse, in its differing modes, is the way in which a democracy articulates its social aspirations. The development of the crisis demonstrated its complex and heterogeneous nature. By following the conventional chronological pattern – students, society, politics – it becomes possible to analyse not only the issues that surfaced, but also the deep-seated weaknesses that the crisis revealed.

*The student movement as evidence of a crisis of social values*

We should remember that the student crisis of 1968 was essentially the French version of an international movement that affected all the great industrial nations and had already taken root in the United States, Japan and West Germany. Though each country had its own specificities, a common basis existed in all the movements. The international crisis resulted from a double rejection of the consumer society that had emerged in the industrialised countries after 1945 and of the traditional social structures and values inherited from the pre-war period. In this way the crisis of May 1968 was the child of economic growth. Though some of its consequences were denounced, growth was nevertheless the source of the rejection of those social constraints seen as unsuited to the evolving state of society in the countries concerned.

The critics' rejection of economic growth was based on its alleged responsibility for the alienation of human personality created by a productivist ideology that tolerated the continuation of deep-seated inequalities within industrialised countries and, at the global level, even greater disparities between industrialised countries and the under-developed nations. Attached to this – frequently Marxist-derived – critique of an oppressive capitalism were more down-to-earth considerations, such as the environmental destruction, and the pollution, engendered by a rampant industrialisation. In every country the principal student demand was for the right to happiness – that fundamental value which crowns the achievements of liberty and the realisation of basic needs and was now seemingly threatened by the imperialism laid bare by Vietnam and by a productivism whose only ideal was financial profit and limitless consumption. Thus an outspoken third worldist denunciation of the bourgeoisie and the large industrial nations (principally the USA but also, to a lesser degree, the USSR) was integrally linked with a determination to preserve human



identity from the alienations that consumer society was alleged to produce. This perspective led to a back-to-nature movement and, in some cases, to a flight from society and a marginal existence like that fashioned by the hippies of California after 1963.

Together with this demand for the right to happiness went a repudiation of nineteenth-century social constraints. In the name of individual self-development, student protesters denounced all forms of authority – that of the state, the employers, the family, organised religion and traditional moral codes – and argued instead for the unfettered expression of nature and instincts. Their demand was that revolution should take place within man as well as in society. This rejection of conformity and bourgeois morality owed less to Marx than to Freud or, to be more precise, to the German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse who drew inspiration from both thinkers. In *Eros and Civilisation* (1955) and *One Dimensional Man* (1965) Marcuse savaged the totalitarianism of bourgeois society and its capacity to alienate the individual not simply through political oppression, but also through new forms of domination and repression (the media and the creation of artificial needs) which chained men still further to society.

The political dimension to this generalised repudiation of society, though real, was essentially an adjunct to the much larger question of society's response to the new problem of economic growth. And it is obvious that in its broadest form the movement was strongest amongst intellectual, and specifically student, groups. It is equally unsurprising that the most determined believers were to be found among sociology students whose subject matter is precisely the analysis of social organisation and its legitimisations.

Thus the international nature of the movement was the overwhelming characteristic of the student contribution to the 1968 crisis. Yet it remains the case that this hurricane took a more devastating and more violent form in France than elsewhere, and that to explain this we need to look at the extraordinary cultural ferment existing in the French university system in 1968.

### *The university powder keg and the explosion of May*

At the heart of the May crisis lay a deep-seated student malaise originating in the tremendous expansion in student numbers during the 1960s. The combination of longer schooling, improved living standards and increased national demand for cadres meant that the number of university students expanded between 1960 and 1968 from 200,000 to 500,000. This spectacular increase contained within it great problems which government handled in what was often a very *ad hoc* way. The number of professors and lecturers available to deal with such a mass of students was inadequate, even after



the recruitment of short-term contract staff. Hence it became necessary in 1959 to create a new corps of tenured staff, the assistant lecturer, and to expand the appointment of assistant and even part-time staff. This inevitably led to growing tensions between the professors, who dominated the universities' governing bodies, and the mass of new appointments who 'enjoyed' subordinate or non-official status but outnumbered their superiors. Another problem was the inability of university accommodation, which had been built for a limited number of students, to cope with the influx of new students. Overcrowded lecture theatres meant that students were unable to find a seat and were regularly required to attend lecture courses in the corridors. In an effort to relieve the pressure on universities that were full beyond bursting point, the government hastily created suburban campuses on vacant sites far from town centres. Thus were born Toulouse-Le Mirail and Nanterre, whose buildings – thrown up on vacant suburban lots – were far removed from city life and came to resemble ghettos in which the students felt isolated and cut off.

To this catalogue of university woes should be added the students' anxieties about their career prospects. Student expansion had been particularly marked in the humanities (enrolments rose by 50 per cent between 1960 and 1968); but this field offered fewer opportunities than law or science, and the careers to which it led (teaching or public service) underwent a marked decline in status when compared, in an age of growth, with the private sector. Moreover the Fouchet reform of June 1966, which came into effect in the session of 1967, made things even worse. By introducing two cycles into sciences and humanities, with a selection process half-way through and also at the end, it multiplied the hurdles which a university student faced.

A final point is that the pedagogical approach of higher education, founded as it was on the formal lecture course, was poorly adapted to the new conditions. Whereas the small-scale student population of the old system had passively accepted its methods, the massed undergraduates of the 1960s were much less tolerant and resented the absence of contact between teacher and taught. France's students were thus a worried and discontented group, susceptible to the denunciations of a society whose shortcomings they experienced at first hand – both as intellectuals and as the victims of its errors. This explains why the conflicts of 1968 originated with the students. But the conflicts could not have occurred without the existence of activist minorities able to detonate the crisis. The most powerful student union, the UNEF, had acquired its maximum influence in uniting students against the Algerian war, but found itself without a clear vision after the Evian agreement. It was split into factions who fought each other for control of the organisation – some were close to the PSU, others originated in the 1965–6 break-up of the Union of Communist Students



(UEC). The young intellectuals who edited the review *Clarté* had manoeuvred for months to get the communist leadership to de-Stalinise the communist movement and to give a modern face to the revolution of which they dreamed. Kicked out of the UEC after the party leadership had taken it in hand, they dispersed into a variety of groups. Some found their revolutionary model in Castro's Cuba and some in Mao's China; in their opposition to Stalinist communism, some called themselves Trotskyists, some anarchists and some Maoists – all titles which demonstrated their double hatred of the capitalist bourgeoisie and bureaucratic totalitarianism. They provided the leadership for a whole circus of 'groupuscules' who furiously debated the coming revolution, published mimeographed newsletters and feverishly discerned in the social conflicts resulting from economic growth the spark that would set the old bourgeois world alight. A student world gone sick was fertile territory for Krivine's JCR, the Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJML), the Comité de liaison des étudiants révolutionnaires (CLER), and so on.

The first cracks in the structure appeared early in 1968 at the University of Nanterre which had been founded in 1963 to relieve the pressure on an overcrowded Sorbonne. There was nothing accidental about the location, for Nanterre was the symbol of the university expansion of the 1960s. It was constructed in the middle of an immense slum where an immigrant population lived crowded together in appalling conditions. It was living evidence of the perceived evils of a society that thought only of profit and cared nothing for man and his needs. Moreover, it represented the archetypal university ghetto, cut off from Paris to which it was linked by nothing more than an infrequently running suburban train service. The first spectacular protest manifestation occurred on 22 March 1968 with the occupation of the Senate Chamber by far-left students led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a sociology student who had been closely watching the unfolding agitation in the German universities since 1967. Immediately after the demonstration, the insurgent students came together in the movement of 22 March. Their goal was clearly revolutionary, and they were uninterested in the university as such. Their overriding concern was to use the student movement – a particularly receptive audience given the difficulties it was experiencing – as a torch to set fire to society. They sought not to reform the university system, but to destroy what they saw as one of the instruments of capitalist society. Thus they aimed to create amongst the mass of university students the feeling that the university provided a form of education that would turn them into auxiliaries, and watchdogs, of capitalism. The ultimate objective was to turn the students not into trade unionists seeking university reform, but into revolutionaries who would join up with the militant workers. What then was the goal of this 'revolution' so constantly invoked that it took on the character of a self-sufficient, mobilising myth?



In the leftists were at one in wanting to bring down the structures and values of the existing society, it is impossible to detect any real strategy for the conquest of power or indeed any clear project for a new society. The most that can be observed is a vague aspiration – for a loosely defined liberation society that would abolish hierarchy and authority structures, where man could work out his own destiny, where imagination would have free rein, and where a decentralised and democratically exercised power structure (preferably in small-scale units) would cease to bear down on the individual with the innumerable constraints, rules and obligations whose alienating implications for the human personality were so passionately denounced.

Such views were shared by a section of French youth and indeed by many in the population at large; but the strategy of a student-led guerrilla campaign against society was restricted to a tiny minority of revolutionaries. Yet it was a strategy which succeeded in paralysing an intellectual organisation – the university – that was by its nature ill suited to cope with verbal terrorism and physical threats. Faced with the endless troubles to which the Nanterre faculty became subject in April 1968, and realising that a normal educational programme had become impossible, the dean, Grappin, decided on 2 May 1968 to close it down.

The consequence of his decision was that agitation switched from Nanterre to the heart of Paris and transformed into a national riot what had hitherto looked like a series of insignificant incidents (the latter point being demonstrated by Pompidou's decision to leave Paris on the very same 2 May for a ten-day visit to Afghanistan). The day after, everything fell apart as the Nanterre microcosm exploded into the crisis of May 1968. Unable to pursue their action at Nanterre, the *gauchiste* students arrived in Paris on 3 May and occupied the courtyard of the Sorbonne. At the request of the rector, the police intervened with some brutality to expel them and made 500 arrests. The immediate result of this was a solidarity movement amongst the students. 2,000 demonstrators invaded the streets of the Latin Quarter, erected barricades and responded with stones and Molotov cocktails to the attempts of the CRS to disperse them with truncheons and tear gas. The clashes lasted far into the night. Thus began a progressive deterioration of the situation which was to last until 11 May. Student marches came up against the police and resulted in innumerable clashes that were immediately broadcast by the reporters of the non-state radio stations who used their radiotelephones to give live coverage of the events. The culminating point of the student phase of the May crisis occurred on the night of 10 and 11 May – the famous 'night of the barricades' – when major street fighting occurred between the students and the forces of order: cars were burnt, paving stones torn up, shop windows smashed and hundreds of demonstrators and police injured. By the time Pompidou got



back to Paris on the evening of 11 May, the situation looked out of control. The prime minister tried to calm things down by taking, or announcing, a series of conciliatory measures: the Sorbonne (which had been closed on 5 May) was re-opened and a promise was given to free the students who had been summarily convicted after the rioting of the night of 3 May. These measures came too late and proved powerless to stop a movement which had by now spilled over into the trade union and political spheres.

Before 11 May, the student agitation had been completely isolated. The Communist Party recognised amongst the leaders of the student movement those whom it had expelled from the leadership of the UEC and roundly condemned the '*gauchiste* minorities' (who for their part were equally rude about Stalinism). The other political forces were alarmed and shocked by a disorder which they did not understand and which seemed out of proportion to its purpose (the problems within the university). Public opinion had for its part been critical of the early stages of the student agitation but became much more sympathetic after 11 May in hostile reaction to the brutality of the police. And it was this shift that was to give a new dimension to the crisis. The next stage of the events thus began on 13 May when the trade unions, hitherto very wary of the student movement, called a general strike and a march in Paris, from the Place de la République to the Place Denfert-Rochereau, to protest against the police brutalities of 10–11 May. On the surface, the march of 200,000 people seemed to mark the triumph of the *gauchiste* leaders of a student movement which now seemingly had the backing of the labour movement. But in reality, 13 May saw the real crisis shift from students to society itself.

### *The social crisis (13–27 May)*

At this stage the government still refused to acknowledge that it had a real crisis on its hands. De Gaulle signalled clearly that no student agitation could deflect the State from its task by flying off on an official visit to Romania. Such ostentatious indifference by the head of state did nothing to calm the students who now abandoned the streets for the faculties. One after the other the universities were occupied – including the Sorbonne which had been re-opened on 13 May – and their lecture courses interrupted in favour of general assemblies where feverish discussions took place, at times on university reform, at other moments on world reconstruction. And as the university crisis became ever more impenetrable, a new phenomenon, more familiar in form but more worrying in its immediate consequences for everyday life, came to the forefront. This was the strike wave that in the second half of May came progressively to paralyse the country.

The strikes began on 14 May at the Sud Aviation plant in Nantes, taking a form that rapidly became typical – the site was occupied and the director



and his staff kidnapped. The following day the strikes spread to the Renault factories at Cléon, Sandouville, Flins and Boulogne-Billancourt. The movement was wholly spontaneous and no official strike call came from the unions until 16 May. The strike wave spread steadily throughout the country until 22 May, again without any national instructions from the union leadership. Ten million people were involved, though it is difficult to distinguish between the authentic strikers and those who were prevented from getting to work by the paralysis of the transport system or were laid off because of the breakdown in supplies. Whatever the reason, however, national life ground to a halt. France was completely paralysed.

French social history provides no parallel for the strikes of May 1968, which can sometimes seem to resemble a vast psychodrama rather than a conventional series of demands. The strikes were spontaneous, the result not of trade union decisions but of grassroots action that was itself contagious, with one strike leading to another. It was only subsequently that the trade union organisations intervened to try to gain control and direction of a movement that was out of their hands by articulating demands that could form the basis for subsequent negotiations – but which were far from being the obvious response to the frequently confused wishes of the strikers. The unprecedented character of the 1968 strikes was further emphasised by the fact that they affected all areas of life – the public and private sectors, the civil service and the service industries, managers as well as workers – and by the seemingly new types of demand that were articulated. It is of course true that the classic demands for higher wages and better working conditions were present; but what is really striking is the importance of the ‘qualitative demands’. Varying as they did from sector to sector and from firm to firm, these demands revealed in their chaotic and tentative fashion the reactions of the wage-earning community to the new forms of production created by the France of growth. Thus a desire existed for a changed style of human relations at the workplace that would give wage-earners a real sense of responsibility, challenge a hierarchical authority structure in the name of collective decision-taking, take into account the workers’ desire to understand the purpose of their labour, and might even establish within the firm structures of genuine co-management. Here one can see the convergences between the student and worker movements: the refusal of existing hierarchies, the rejection of the authority principle, the desire for participation in the decision-taking process, the determination to acknowledge human dignity in all its spheres. These show the deep-seated desire within French society for social structures to be transformed.

The desire was frequently accompanied by a utopian discourse that sought revolution through the construction of cells of worker power in



every workplace, the challenging of qualifications that were seen as useless, and that believed that the self-development of social actors was more important than production figures. It thus becomes pretty obvious that the second fortnight of May brought to the surface both the deep-rooted malaise of a society that had been subjected to the brutal mutations caused by growth and the unfocused aspirations presaged by Mendès France in his *Pour une République moderne*. The latter resembled a collection of hopes rather than a concrete programme. But did they actually constitute a base of that revolutionary ferment which the *gauchiste* leaders so fervently sought? The latter certainly thought so, and their dominant preoccupation after 13 May became to realise the unity of the student and worker movements, a unity which would render more possible than could students alone the revolutionary scenario of their imagination. But the student placards 'Workers, student, teacher unity' expressed hopes rather than realities. The students' efforts to establish links with the striking workers came up against the CGT's determination to keep the *gauchistes*, whom it distrusted, at bay – and also against the incredulity of the workers themselves when faced with the radical language of intellectuals.

For all that the social explosion of May 1968 was unprecedented, and for that very reason destabilising, it did not ignite a revolutionary conflagration. Yet its solution was made all the more difficult by the fact that when faced with new types of demand, both government and unions could only reply in conventional ways. Their responses had no effect on the movement and contributed to the feeling that the situation was out of control.

The first response to the strikers was political and came from de Gaulle. On his return from Romania on 18 May, the president of the Republic seemed to take the situation in hand with the lapidary – and untranslatable – declaration: 'la réforme, oui, le chienlit, non' (which can be modestly rendered as 'reform yes, havoc no'). His 24 May broadcast announced a referendum giving authority to the head of state to 'change wherever necessary outdated and rigid structures'. The proposal certainly corresponded to the nature of the demands being made. But the vagueness of its proclaimed principles poorly adapted them to the gravity of the situation, and the mechanism proposed, which amounted to giving de Gaulle another blank cheque, was even more so. The 24 May speech had no effect on the strike movement and even de Gaulle realised that he had made a mistake.

Georges Pompidou was closer to the ground and so chose the path of negotiation. In the afternoon of 25 May he brought together at the Ministry of Labour (in the rue de Grenelle) representatives of the employers, headed by the CNPF boss Paul Huvelin, and of the major trade unions. The prime minister's task seemed to be made easier by divisions within the trade unions, divisions that reflected their analyses of French society in its



age of growth. The CGT was very sceptical about a movement which it was unable to control, which seemed to have been infiltrated by extremists and which it did not consider to be revolutionary given that its principal goal was not the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production. Thus the CGT sought as speedy an end as possible to an agitation that it found alarming and that it sought to divert into the reassuring and familiar avenues of classic trade union demands – wage increases, reduced working hours, trade union rights. The attitude of the CFDT was completely different. In line with the new approaches to trade union action which it had introduced, the CFDT put the accent on qualitative demands, on the development of shop floor rights through the legalising of trade union branches at the workplace, and on internal transformations of labour relations. Though well adapted to the new aspirations, such demands lacked precision; but to the prime minister and the employers they seemed foolhardy, if not actually destructive of the existing social order. Thus Pompidou and the bosses preferred to negotiate with the CGT where they were on familiar ground. And indeed both sides shared the same desire to corral a movement whose final destination they could not foresee, even if this meant government and employers making some sacrifices to satisfy a few long-held demands of the unions. These were the bases for the register of proposals – incorrectly known as the Grenelle Agreement (since no one signed it) – which Georges Pompidou drew up at dawn on 27 May. The proposals were for a 35 per cent increase in the minimum wage, a two-stage wage increase of 10 per cent, a reduction in the social security charges, a reduction of one hour in the working week before the end of the Fifth Plan, the recognition of trade union workplace branches, and half pay during strikes. Through dealing with the largest trade union in France, Pompidou had won – or so it seemed. He was able to ignore the structural transformations sought by the CFDT by giving way on material and quantitative matters.

But the choice of a political strategy for a social crisis again revealed its inadequacies when its results were measured against the realities of the situation. For the Grenelle Agreement, important though it was, utterly failed to match the expectations and the aspirations of the strikers who were looking for something completely different – and so it dropped like a stone. When Georges Séguy presented the Grenelle Agreement to a lunch-time meeting of Renault strikers on 27 May, he came up against a flat rejection. Given that the combatants appeared to be on the point of winning, the strike continued.

Thus government proved to be as powerless to resolve the social crisis as it had been to master the university crisis. And it is indeed striking to note the distance separating movements whose character raised basic questions of social organisation and values from the traditional sorts of response that were proffered. On 27 May the government appeared to have exhausted its



arsenal and to have nothing further to offer, while the parties and the unions had shown too that they had no control over the movement. At a moment when French society appeared to be disintegrating, the very existence of government seemed threatened by a civil society which had broken free of its control mechanisms and had become indifferent to political authority. The crisis now moved onto the political field, a domain where both parties and government were more easily able to act and to gain control of the situation.

*The political crisis (27–31 May)*

The twin failures of de Gaulle's 24 May speech and of Pompidou's social negotiation of 27 May created the impression of a veritable power vacuum. In the hours and days that followed differing solutions were proposed to the population as a way out of the political impasse that was by now evident.

The first such alternative came on 27 May from the organisations which were seemingly closest to the new aspirations expressed during the May movement – the student union (UNEF) and the PSU. With the backing of the CFDT, these two summoned a huge rally at the Charl  ty Stadium to demonstrate the possibility of a revolutionary solution to the crisis. 30,000 leftist demonstrators turned up, as did Mend  s France who, in staying silent, indicated his backing for a movement of which he refused to become the possible leader.

The following day two further political – but more conventional – solutions were advanced. The first came from the non-communist Left. Fran  ois Mitterrand, as president of the FGDS, declared the existence of a power vacancy which he proposed to fill by the constitution of a provisional government of ten men to be presided over by Mend  s France. He also advocated a presidential election in July (for which he would be candidate) and an election in October for a National Assembly to replace the one elected in 1967. The following day Mend  s France responded to the various offers that he had been made by declaring that he was ready to carry out a mandate offered by the united Left.

On the very same 28 May, the Communist Party launched a campaign for a 'popular government' whose contours were completely obscure except for the fact that there was to be no prominent place in it for Mend  s France. It was the latter whom Waldeck Rochet (Thorez's successor (since 1964) as PCF secretary general) had in his sights when he declared: 'It is absurd to think that socialism can be achieved without the communists, and even more so to do so while engaging in the sort of anti-communism heard at Charl  ty.'

But was it actually the case that the political power that the Left proclaimed itself ready to assume and for which it was preparing the



succession was vacant? On 29 May, when the political crisis reached its climax, it was not unreasonable to think that the answer was yes. For the rumour spread that General de Gaulle had disappeared, having postponed at the last moment a council of ministers, and had left the Elysée for Colombey – where he had not arrived. In the space of a few hours, the most extravagant scenarios ran riot within the political class, were taken up by the media, and brought drama to a situation that was already dramatic enough. There was talk of suicide, of resignation, of a withdrawal to the headquarters of the nuclear strike force at Taverny or to the fort of Brégançon, of his departure abroad ... The fact that even the prime minister was incapable of supplying an answer to the nation's questions added to the impression of a power vacuum. Only at 6 p.m. was the mystery resolved. It was learned that General de Gaulle had arrived at Colombey and that a council of ministers was summoned for the following day, 30 May. For de Gaulle had actually used his disappearance to visit General Massu, the commander of France's forces in West Germany, in Baden Baden. At the time the significance of this visit caused, as it continues to cause now, great controversy amongst those who witnessed it and who have conflicting memories. Did it show – as Massu and Pompidou claimed – a crisis of confidence by de Gaulle who was ready to give up and was eventually persuaded by Massu to stay on? Or was it, as de Gaulle's collaborators claimed in a thesis subsequently taken up by François Goguel, a tactical decision designed to dramatise the situation in order to alarm the French with the fear of the political vacuum that remained de Gaulle's ultimate weapon and gave him time to define the elements of his plans to regain control of the situation? It must be said that nothing exists to substantiate the claim, advanced at the time, that de Gaulle sought to obtain the support of the army against the possibility of an insurrection.

It is difficult to adjudicate between these two principal theses, both of which have solid arguments. What can be said is that if there was a crisis of confidence, it had been overcome by the evening of 29 May, and that if the desire to dramatise the situation and create a shock effect lay at the heart of de Gaulle's disappearance, then the tactic was successful.

For on 30 May the turnaround occurred. After the council of ministers, the general made a broadcast to take things in hand. The tone had changed from that of 24 May: this time there was to be no question of responding to the social aspirations revealed by the crisis. Instead the aim was to use the dramatic effect of the previous day's events – the fear of the political unknown, the weariness felt by the French after a month of disorderly agitation, the incessant negotiations, the difficulties caused by the strikes – to reaffirm the authority of a State that had been severely shaken in recent weeks. Adopting the style of the great dramatic speeches of the period of putsch and insurrection, the president of the Republic raised the spectre,



which was in no sense a real one, of a communist *coup d'état* in order to make a series of authoritative decisions: his intention to maintain in office the prime minister whose resignation was sought by the opposition, and even by the independent republicans; the dissolution of the National Assembly and the holding of new elections; and his determination to use the exceptional weapons which the constitution gave him should the situation deteriorate. The speech finished with an appeal to the French to come to the (civil) defence of the existing political order.

The impact of the appeal was immediate. It was as if pro-government feeling had been waiting for de Gaulle's invitation to launch a spontaneous demonstration of support. The demonstration which made its way down the Champs Elysées on the evening of 30 May had in fact been carefully planned by the Gaullist leaders for several days. But its success was at once substantial and beyond expectations. Some 300,000–400,000 demonstrators marched behind apostles of Gaullism like Michel Debré, André Malraux and François Mauriac to proclaim their support for the general. For the first time in a month the Left no longer monopolised the streets. Government had only recently appeared to be on the verge of collapse; now it had regained the initiative. During the following days, demonstrations in the provinces showed that the tide had indeed turned.

Thus an extraordinary shift occurred in the centre of gravity of the crisis. It had begun in the university and social milieux and was by that very fact indefinable, given that what was at stake was the very structures of society and traditional social values – with the gigantic collective outpouring of 1968 representing the explosion onto the public stage of individual frustrations and problems. But then the crisis moved into the political arena which was better known and more familiar, where the issues could be expressed in language whose code could be understood by the combatants, and where the outcome would result from a simple process – the vote. It has become customary to underline the relief with which all the institutional players turned back from a crisis situation where they had no role to political normality. Government, parties and trade unions all expressed their support for the election, launched their campaigns and took care to avoid any activity that might seem to threaten the democratic process. A similar evolution occurred in public opinion. Many people approved the new spirit of May, but now sought an end to a situation which appeared to have no outcome. They wanted to get back to normal, to go back to work, to forget the difficulties that the continuance of strikes posed for everyday life. As a result, the students, leftists and trade unionists, who tried in June to prolong the strikes and the (frequently violent) demonstrations and who denounced the elections as a betrayal, found themselves regarded as hooligans, isolated and henceforth powerless over a social reality which they had dominated for a month.



On the political battleground each side sharpened its weapons. As early as 31 May, Georges Pompidou, confirmed in office, reorganised his government and excluded the ministers who, in whatever capacity, were held responsible for the events either because of decisions they had taken, or because they had not foreseen the consequences of their actions, or because their mistakes had allowed the situation to deteriorate. Those to depart were the Education Minister Alain Peyrefitte; the acting prime minister (during Pompidou's Afghanistan trip) Louis Joxe; the Interior Minister, Christian Fouchet; the Minister of Youth, François Missoffe; the Information Minister, George Gorse; and the Social Affairs Minister, Jean-Marcel Jeanneney. They were replaced either by pure-bred Gaullists like René Capitant (at Justice), or by men who enjoyed the prime minister's confidence (François-Xavier Ortoli at Education, Raymond Marcellin at the Interior).

Apart from the preparation of the elections, the government's chief priority was to regain its authority over a situation that had lurched out of its control for a month. In this respect the measures taken were in line with what public opinion expected. The symbolic actions of mid-June – the banning of certain leftist movements, the evacuation of the Odéon theatre and then of the Sorbonne – provoked no more than ritual protests. May seemed already to belong to the past now that the electoral hour had struck. What was still unclear was the effect that the May crisis would have on the political preferences of the electorate. Would it produce an electoral landslide condemning a governmental system that popular feeling had swept aside and denounced for a month? Or would it lead to the rejection of the far Left's attempts to destabilise society?

### *The June 1968 elections and the consolidation of Gaullism*

The first characteristic of the June 1968 elections was that the crisis had simplified the issues, and this was a considerable benefit to the government. Under Pompidou's control, the Gaullists united under the single label of the UDR and ran a campaign exclusively directed at the defence of order and the denunciation of everything that menaced it, namely the 'communist plot'. Thus a familiar and identifiable adversary, whose actual role during the crisis had been that of a brake, was identified with leftist groups who were themselves extremely hostile to the French Communist Party. To this defence of a threatened order were summoned all those who might constitute a rampart against the Left – the independent republicans (who stood under majority colours in 120 constituencies) and those centrists, like René Pleven, who were close to power. The 'sacred union' against disorder was even extended to former supporters of French Algeria. Pardons (including one to Raoul Salan), an amnesty law, and the authorisation to



Table 25. *Legislative elections of 23 June 1968: first round*

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	28,171,635	100	
Votes	22,539,743		
Abstentions	5,631,892	19.9	
Spoilt papers	401,086	1.4	
PCF	4,435,357	15.7	20
PSU	874,212	3.1	3.9
FGDS	3,654,003	12.9	16.5
Other Left	133,100	0.4	0.6
UFD-Independent Republicans	10,201,024	36.3	46
Centre PDM	2,290,165	8.1	14.4
Moderates	410,699	1.4	1.8
Others	140,097	0.5	0.6

return to France granted to Georges Bidault and Jacques Soustelle were aimed at wiping the slate clean and rallying the French Algeria electorate.

Faced with the brutally unambiguous campaign of the majority, the Left was plunged into total disarray. Only the PSU, which presented 300 candidates and supported the message of May, campaigned on the movement's themes. The FGDS and PCF by contrast ran strictly traditional campaigns, based wholly on the government's responsibility for the crisis, and sought to reassure the electorate by stressing their commitment to legality and the need for reforms that could only come from victory at the ballot box.

Faced with the hesitations of the opposition and the certainties of the majority, the response of the electorate was unambiguous. The election of 1968 was all about fear. Fear of disorder, of subversion, of the 'communist plot' which Pompidou denounced, but fear also of risk, of the threat to the benefits of growth whose advantages society came to appreciate at the moment when it risked losing them. Undoubtedly this fear was felt by a silent majority which had been speechless in May as, with horror, it watched social collapse and governmental impotence. But fear was also the response of many of those who had participated in the movement and given vent to undefined hopes and frustrations by strikes in their factory and their locality, but who had absolutely no desire to go down a revolutionary road which had no destination and looked at once vertiginous and terrifying. To put it another way the electoral process, whose purpose is to designate governmental power, is different in kind from the act of pure protest which involves marching, demonstrating and petitioning. Thus it is less paradoxical than it might seem that a people which had apparently chosen the path of protest in May should vote in June for order; and it is not necessary to



Table 26. *Legislative elections of 23 and 30 June 1968: outcome in seats*

Majority		Opposition	Comparison with 1967	
UDR	293		+ 93	
Independent Republicans	61		+ 19	
Total	354			
		PCF	34	– 39
		FGDS	57	– 64
		PDM	33	+ 8
	Independents		9	+ 1

explain this turnaround by arguing that those who voted for the majority were those who had been panic-stricken in May. But on the evening of the first round of the elections on 23 June, there was a massive popular vote in favour of a return to normality.

The victory of the existing majority was of landslide proportions. Its various components obtained 46 per cent of the vote, a new record in French electoral history and 8 per cent higher than its 1967 total. By contrast, all the opposition parties fell back with the exception of the PSU, which advanced from 2.2 per cent to 3.9 per cent (though it had presented more than 300 candidates compared with 100 the previous year). The centrist and the opposition moderates fell back sharply, losing more than five percentage points, most of which went to the majority: obviously their electorate had voted overwhelmingly for the restoration of order. The same applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to the Left, since the FGDS vote fell in a year from 18.7 per cent to 16.5 per cent, and that of the communists from 22.4 per cent to 20 per cent. It is true that a certain percentage of the losses of the two principal Left formations went to swell the votes of the PSU and the abstentionists, who rose from 19.1 to 19.9 per cent. Hence the message of the first round was that the electorate had rejected the May movements. A government which had looked to be finished found itself strengthened, while its opponents, regarded as supporters of, or at any rate complaisant towards, disorder, were punished. And in contrast to 1967, the results of the second round confirmed what had happened in the first.

As soon as the results of round one were known, the victory of the majority became a virtual certainty – the UDR had already won 144 of the 154 seats decided on 23 June. Since the centrist voters held the key to the result in the majority of the seats that went to a second round, it was highly likely that their vote would not go, as it had done in 1967, to the enemies of Gaullism but to the candidates who stood for order. Thus the only surprise of the second round was the extraordinary magnitude of a victory for the majority that took on landslide proportions.



For the first time in the history of the Fifth Republic, a single group acquired an overall majority in the National Assembly. The UDR had 293 of the 487 parliamentary seats. If we add its independent republican allies (whose Assembly representation rose by 50 per cent) and a handful of other independents, it possessed 75 per cent of the total seats. UDR domination was all the more overwhelming in that the three opposition formations had been crushed in the election and weakened by their defeat, and that the progress and democracy group led by Jacques Duhamel felt strongly attracted to the charms of the majority.

The 1968 elections, in putting an end to the brutal crisis of May, can fairly be described as paradoxical. A month earlier Gaullism, like society as a whole, had seemed threatened with destruction by a protest movement whose goals were extra-institutional but which it was quite unable to control. Now, at the end of June, it had won a stunning victory, its greatest since 1958 and one that was without precedent in the annals of parliament. In appearance, therefore, the crisis resulted in the consolidation of a Gaullism that had been damaged by its unimpressive electoral victories of 1965 and 1967. De Gaulle looked to be totally invulnerable and could pride himself on having successfully overcome yet another dramatic challenge. Yet in fact the overwhelming electoral victory of 1968 posed as many problems as it solved. The 'reactionary Chamber' of 1968 was composed of conservative deputies who had been chosen by a terrified electorate to preserve order against the threat of revolution. It was soon to show itself notably more conservative than the head of state, and highly suspicious of any initiative which it regarded as too risky. And while it is true that the electorate had reacted massively against any threat to the fruits of growth, it is equally the case that none of the pre-1968 problems that had weakened Gaullism and produced the electoral disappointments of 1965 and 1967 had really gone away. Once the elections were over, these problems would return, and it was obvious that the Assembly elected in 1968 was going to be a handicap rather than a help to their possible solution. Thus the consolidation of de Gaulle's power was more apparent than real. Nine months later universal suffrage was to inflict a clear defeat on de Gaulle's Republic. In so doing it demonstrated that the explosion of May 1968 was in no sense an accident, but rather the expression of a profound upheaval in society itself.



## Failed recovery and the end of de Gaulle's Republic

The period separating the 1968 election from the referendum of April 1969 underlined the gap that had by now opened up between de Gaulle and a public opinion which he no longer comprehended. It also demonstrated another – and new – gap, the one separating de Gaulle from the Gaullists, whose views on the lessons to be learned from the May crisis manifestly differed from his. The first evidence of this separation came with the formation of the new government.

### *The Couve de Murville government*

Having for a moment appeared overwhelmed by the sudden crisis of 1968 and to have left the struggle for a return to normality to his prime minister, de Gaulle was now determined to use the victory he had finally won to take things firmly in hand and to give new life to the regime. Early in July the proof of this came in his decision, which caused general astonishment, to 'accept the resignation' of Georges Pompidou, widely regarded as the real hero of the recent hurricane. The decision came as a complete shock.

It is true that the prime minister had offered his resignation to de Gaulle on several occasions, during the crisis, between the two rounds, and then again after round two. Bernard Tricot, the Elysée secretary general, was the recipient of these insistent offers. But de Gaulle refused, with equal insistence, to accept them. Once the elections were over, Pompidou's position seemed stronger than ever. Had he not, in the worst moments of the crisis, stood firm and assured the existence and the continuity of the state at a time when the wheels of society and of the administration had stopped turning? Had he not organised the majority, led it into battle and won a historic victory in the June elections? Many of those who won, or regained, their seats in the 1968 elections regarded Pompidou as the real leader of the new conservative majority rather than the symbolic, remote figure of de Gaulle who seemed far removed from everyday politics.

If we are to believe the evidence of Pompidou himself – and it is evidence which many other witnesses confirm – his removal from power was the



result of an unfortunate mix-up. Having been finally convinced by those close to him to carry on, the prime minister informed the Elysée secretary general of his decision, only to be told later that de Gaulle had thought his earlier decision was irrevocable and had already offered the job to Maurice Couve de Murville (Eric Roussel argues in his biography of Pompidou that the latter was set up by de Gaulle). Leaving aside the detail, it is legitimate to feel that there were actually more solid political reasons for Pompidou's departure. Amongst the more conventional arguments advanced are the need to change a prime minister to avoid political fatigue – Pompidou had been prime minister for six years; and the divergences that had emerged between president and prime minister over how to handle the May crisis, with de Gaulle wanting a reformist response and Pompidou advocating conservatism. Yet the most convincing explanation is that which stresses Pompidou's very success and his ability to personify the state during May. The possibility this raised of a dyarchy was intolerable in a regime based on the theory of presidential supremacy. Once the prime minister came to enjoy a strong personal position, he ceased to be the president's servant and risked eclipsing him. It was to avoid this danger that Pompidou was removed. Yet his departure was softened by the flattering words with which de Gaulle accompanied his decision, words, moreover, that opened up a political future for his ex-prime minister, given that in his 9 September press conference the general declared that he was placing Pompidou 'in the reserve of the Republic' and inviting him to hold himself ready 'for any mandate with which the nation might one day entrust him'. Public opinion saw this as equivalent to making Pompidou a possible dauphin, something which the latter himself affected to believe, even though it was actually no more than balm designed to soothe the gaping wound of the break.

With Pompidou now a simple 'deputy for Cantal' (to use the words with which André Malraux saluted him), the new prime minister was Maurice Couve de Murville, the Fifth Republic's immovable (until 1968) Minister of Foreign Affairs and a man whose discretion and efficiency at the head of French diplomacy had been admired by de Gaulle. In fact, the structure of the government, leaving aside the change of prime minister, differed little from its predecessor. Apart from François-Xavier Ortoli, a friend of Pompidou's who replaced Couve de Murville at the Finance Ministry (which the latter had only held since 30 May), the majority of the ministers stayed put: Michel Debré at Foreign Affairs; Raymond Marcellin at the Interior; René Capitant at Justice; Maurice Schumann at Social Affairs; and Olivier Guichard at the National Plan and Regional Development. Innovation was to reside not in the composition of the new government, but in the programme which de Gaulle intended it to carry out.

This programme can be defined in one word – participation. De Gaulle's analysis – and it did not lack subtlety – of the May crisis was that of the



demand of a people fed up with being controlled in an authoritarian manner to be able to participate in the decisions that affected them. Hence he decided to realise the aspiration by setting the Fifth Republic, now consolidated by the June elections, on the road to this reform. Participation was to apply to all areas of social and political life. Once again de Gaulle adjourned the reform of social relations through that industrial participation which left-wing Gaullists had been demanding for so long; he did not believe that the time was yet ripe for a measure which he saw as crowning the whole edifice. But he decided on the immediate introduction of participation in the two zones where he felt that demand was strongest, and entrusted the task to two men who since 1966 had symbolised Gaullism's will for reform and for opening things up. The first of these two areas was the university, where the demand for new relationships had been made abundantly clear during the May crisis. Appointed Minister of National Education, Edgar Faure was entrusted with the task of reorganising a school and university system that had fallen apart. France's administrative system was the second area, and here the aim was to bring the citizen closer to the centres of decision-taking, something that required the creation of a regional structure that would give to the 'living forces' of the nation (employers, trade unionists, representatives of cultural organisations) the active role which universal suffrage did not allow to be expressed. Jean-Marcel Jeanneney was appointed Minister of State for Institutional Reform with the task of introducing participation in this area.

Participation thus became the key element in the attempt to relaunch de Gaulle's Republic.

### *Edgar Faure's university reform*

The new minister of National Education was obliged to act quickly. The May crisis had interrupted the university year, exams had not been held, and it looked impossible to start the new academic year without promising reform that would satisfy the students and make it possible to isolate the leftists who were waiting for the end of the vacation to restart their action. With the help of a dynamic team composed of progressive academics, some of whom were close to the Left, Faure laid down during the summer of 1968 the bases of a reform that was to become a framework law for parliament to vote on. Having been adopted by the council of ministers on 19 September 1968, and presented to a specially summoned parliamentary session on 24 September, the proposal was the subject of discussion throughout October before finally being adopted on 12 November. Put into effect over the following years, the orientation law was based on two major principles that responded to the wishes of the majority of the university community while provoking the suspicion of the more conservative elements and the open



hostility of the leftists, who savaged a reformism that risked depriving them of a terrain in which they could advance their revolutionary designs.

The first of the two principles enshrined in the new law was participation. As applied to the university, it involved entrusting the management of institutions and of the teaching and research centres (*unités d'enseignement et de recherche*) they contained to elected councils in which all grades of workers were represented – the various categories of teachers, the administrative and clerical staff, the students. It was the end of a university system exclusively run by its professors, and many of the latter were hostile to a reform that challenged their power by obliging them to share it with elected representatives whose competence – and politicisation – they feared.

The second principle laid down in the law was university autonomy. The goal was to allow universities to introduce new courses based on interdisciplinarity and to be innovatory with regard to teaching programmes and methods, developments made easier by the fact that the system of flexible (and transferable) 'course credits' replaced the rigid organisation into academic years and degrees. Yet the maintenance of nationally awarded degrees and the refusal to give financial autonomy to universities were significant limitations on the principle of autonomy.

Notwithstanding the multiple (and long-lasting) after-effects of the May disturbances, Faure's law was generally well received in the universities who devoted themselves in the following months to implementing its provisions. On the surface, it was also a political success. After weeks of discussion it was adopted by 441 votes to nil with 39 abstentions (the communists plus 6 UDR members) in the National Assembly, and by 260 votes to nil with 18 abstentions in the Senate. But this triumph was in fact illusory. The discussion period had revealed disagreements between a reformist minister who enjoyed the full support of the president of the Republic and the majority which believed that the law was too sensitive to the demands of the leftists; deplored the fact that it brought politics into the university; and did not conceal its desire to see the students brought back under control, if necessary by repression. While it is true that the UDR parliamentarians eventually voted the orientation law so as not publicly to disavow de Gaulle, it is equally clear that they did so reluctantly. The legislature's first important vote was unable to paper over the split revealed by the discussion in the relationship between the president of the Republic and the majority elected in June 1968. Unable to criticise de Gaulle himself, the more conservative wing of the UDR concentrated their fire on the ministers who were carrying out his policy – and Edgar Faure was a prime target. He was strongly attacked by the Committees for the Defence of the Republic, which had been created in May to defend the regime and brought together the most right-wing Gaullists. The latter



looked hopefully to Pompidou who, while staying discreetly on the sidelines, seemed to be the concealed leader of the majority and the real leader of the UDR, whose apparatus he had put in place in 1967. Pompidou, like all the Gaullists, had voted for the orientation law. But he did not hide the reservations he felt about it or about the ideas, which he regarded as demagogic, of Edgar Faure. (He deployed Michel Bruguière, his former special adviser for university affairs, in the corridors of parliament to try to stall Faure's initiatives.) Discreetly expressed though they were, Pompidou's doubts about the Faure university law were sufficiently well known for many observers to believe that he inspired the violent attack launched on them at the December 1968 meeting of the Dijon Committee for the Defence of the Republic. At this meeting, held in a city whose mayor was Robert Poujade (the general secretary of the UDR), Faure's actions were denounced as phony.

#### *Jean-Marcel Jeanneney's regional reform*

Whereas the university reform package was made necessary by events, regional reform, and the constitutional reform that occasioned it, were not an urgent item on the political agenda. They were rather the terrain deliberately selected by de Gaulle for the referendum he sought as a way of re-establishing, in the aftermath of the May crisis, the legitimacy he derived from universal suffrage. On 24 May he had made regional reform his response to the tide of opposition that was sweeping the country; but the indifference with which the French people greeted his proposal forced him to adjourn it. Ever since then he had constantly had in mind the use of a procedure which would renew his own contract with the French people, the more so since the June elections were the responsibility of Pompidou and the latter's sweeping triumph was won in the name of order rather than Gaullism. The referendum that de Gaulle so wanted was essential to his concept of his power; yet it required the choice of a subject that would enable the French people to show, by their overwhelming approval of the issue presented to them, that de Gaulle still enjoyed their confidence. Given that the referendum procedure was designed to deal with issues concerning the organisation of public power Jean-Marcel Jeanneney was entrusted with the task of preparing a reform along these lines. Yet it was apparent that the content of the reform, for all that it reflected the participation which was the watchword of post-1968 Gaullism, was less important than the referendum, for which it was the pretext rather than the cause.

Though the two elements of Jeanneney's project, which formed the referendum of 27 April 1969, were linked together, they derived from different principles. The first sought to establish in France a form of regional organisation that would realise the French desire to participate in



the decisions affecting them at local level. According to the proposal, the regions would be 'our former provinces brought up to date, with each one possessing enough territory, resources and inhabitants to be able to play its part in the overall national effort'. In concrete terms, the future regional council, placed under the supervision (*tutelle*) of a regional prefect, would have cognisance of development projects concerning the region in the Plan and elsewhere. In relation to its defined objectives, the reform looked modest so far as the competences of the regions and the method of selecting their councils were concerned. The latter were not to be elected by universal suffrage – a method which might have produced genuine local mobilisation. Instead, three-fifths of the regional councillors were to be nominated by locally elected officials, departmental councillors and delegates of municipal councils. More original – and more interesting – was the procedure for nominating the remaining two-fifths, who were to be selected by local professional organisations of farmers, business and industry, by trade unions and by cultural and community organisations. This marked the realisation of the wish, articulated much earlier by de Gaulle's Bayeux speech of 1946 but never implemented, to give representation to the nation's living forces'. The creation of the regions necessarily involved the modification of article 27 of the constitution, which dealt with territorial authorities, and hence justified the use of the referendum. Yet it has to be admitted that the dominant response of the French to the content of this first theme of the reform was indifference.

Indifference is not the right word to characterise the response to the second theme of the reform, which focused on the Senate. The text of the referendum proposed that the Second Chamber and the Economic and Social Council should be replaced by a consultative Senate, whose attributions and composition were to change completely. The new Senate was to be a forum for the representation not only of territorial collectivities (as it had been in earlier Republics and before 1969), but also of economic, social and cultural actors. To fulfil this function it would, like the regional councils, have two categories of membership: 173 representatives of mainland and overseas authorities elected on a regional basis for a six-year term by an electoral college composed of deputies, regional and departmental councils and delegates of municipal councils; 146 senators appointed by the representative national organisations of economic, social and cultural groups. The new Assembly would have no legislative function whatsoever and would have no right to control government. Its role was limited to giving obligatory and prior advice on all government and private members' bills – advice which the National Assembly was not required to follow.

The reform of the Senate, at least in its composition, paralleled that of the regional councils, a fact which gave an overall coherence to the referendum



proposal. Yet the reduction in the powers of the second Chamber meant that the latter was virtually excluded from the parliament of which it was constitutionally a part; and public opinion saw in this de Gaulle's desire to make the Senate, a bastion of the opposition, pay for the guerrilla war it had waged against his power ever since 1958. This judgement was confirmed by the clause in the bill modifying the procedures for the temporary filling of a vacancy in the presidency. If the proposal were adopted, the interim presidency would be assumed not, as hitherto, by the president of the Senate, but by the prime minister who was thereby confirmed as the second person in the State.

Senate reform, unlike the proposals for the regions, unleashed great hostility. Opposition came not only from the bulk of the senators, led by their president, the centrist Alain Poher (who had just replaced, in October 1968, the radical Gaston Monnerville), but also from the mass of local councillors. The latter, indignant at the threat to an Assembly which represented their interests, formed a massive opposition and one that spread right across the country through the networks of influential notables. They were to have a major role in the final outcome of the referendum. Yet that outcome cannot be understood properly without reference to the overall state of public opinion in spring 1969, the moment when de Gaulle deliberately chose to gamble on the future of his Republic.

### *France in spring 1969: a coalition of discontent*

In the electoral campaign that got underway in April 1969, de Gaulle had to face not only the usual opposition, but also the defection of many members of those groups who normally supported Gaullism. Initially planned by de Gaulle for December 1968, the date of the referendum was put back at the request of the prime minister, Couve de Murville. It may well be that by enabling the opposition forces to mobilise and discontents to surface, this delay actually sealed the fate of the project.

That the opposition of the Left should advocate the rejection of the referendum proposal was unsurprising. Virtually excluded from the regime since 1968, the Left was the natural home of anti-government opposition. The referendum gave it a chance to recover from the crushing election defeat of June 1968. The Left had failed to benefit from the perceived fragility of the regime between 1965 and 1967, and had been no more successful in profiting from the events of May 1968. When, at the end of 1968, it attempted to do so, the attempt blew up in its face since it became identified with the hooligans of the extreme Left just at the moment when public opinion was tiring of disturbances and wanted a return to order. Yet the political Left, for all its calls to action, was not really in a state to re-open an offensive against the government. The Communist Party had



been profoundly shaken by the Warsaw Pact invasion (which it initially condemned) of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and was isolated and prey to self-doubt. The electoral defeat of 1968 had plunged the FGDS into crisis and Mitterrand abandoned its presidency in November. Similar tensions existed among the opposition centrists where the 1968 elections had widened the gulf between the irreconcilable opponents of Gaullism, led by Jean Lecanuet and Pierre Abelin, and the governmentals, under Jacques Duhamel and Joseph Fontanet, who were tempted to join up with the Majority. In these circumstances it was the trade unions who became the driving force of the opposition to the project.

The Grenelle Agreement had strongly inflationist consequences that threatened the benefits of the wage increases of May 1968. The trade unionists managed to obtain fresh overall negotiations with the employers to examine the situation. But the 'Tilsitt conference' (named after the street in which the French employers' organisation had its headquarters) was a failure, in part because of the government's desire to hold back wages to reduce inflation. A public-sector strike on 11 March testified to the bitterness of many wage-earners, and the discontent of the trade unions worked to embitter the social climate and to deepen the hostility of some voters to the government.

Opposition from sectors where Gaullism had always been in a minority was reinforced by opposition coming from groups which had traditionally supported the majority. One such group was the shopkeepers and artisans. Economic growth and the modernisation of methods of production and distribution created, as in 1950–3, great difficulties for small, and uncompetitive, firms. The result was a flood of bankruptcies, tax problems and seizures of goods that enraged the independent middle class and led them to rise up in protest. The neo-Poujadist agitation of 1968–9 found its leader in Gerard Nicoud, who became a violent opponent of a government that he condemned for its inadequate defence of the small businessman.

At the other end of the business community, dissatisfaction – though less visible – was no less real. The most successful economic sectors scarcely bothered to conceal their disapproval of Michel Debré's economic policy which they regarded as excessively dirigiste. They were very critical of the increased tax burden that François-Xavier Ortoli imposed on higher incomes and death duties. The capital flight that resulted was made all the greater by the fact that in September 1968, the government decided to restore confidence by ending currency controls. This in turn led to speculation, both inside and outside France, against the franc as dealers gambled on its likely devaluation against a revalued deutschmark. The prospect of a devaluation was viewed favourably by the business community who saw it as a means of favouring French exports at a time when they had been penalised by increased costs due to the wage rises of 1968. In November



1968 the devaluation of the franc appeared imminent. But even as its new value was being calculated, de Gaulle, with the backing of his minister of state Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, came out strongly against devaluation on political grounds, declaring that 'such an operation would not be a solution but rather a short-term trick of ruinous laxity and one that would reward those who are gambling on our decline'. Devaluation was off; but the decision caused great disappointment in business circles and was criticised by Giscard d'Estaing, who put himself at the head of an internal, lurking opposition within the Majority. Pompidou himself, while avoiding any public statement, let it be known in private (and confidences get around) that he regarded the government's monetary policy as archaic and unrealistic.

The coalition of discontent, thus had its political implications. Opposition was not limited to the Left and the centrists, to the senators and local councillors. It also existed, discreetly but in some cases bitterly, in the ranks of the Majority. For the government, this was much more serious.

The most audible dissonance came, unsurprisingly, from within the ranks of the independent republicans. Excluded from office since 1966, Giscard d'Estaing multiplied his semi-criticisms of de Gaulle's political methods and of his authoritarianism, endeavouring to present himself and his party as more open and more modern than the UDR. As president of the finance commission of the National Assembly (to which he had been elected after the 1967 elections) he was a regular critic of his successors at the rue de Rivoli and went so far as to abstain in the overall budget vote in November 1967. The UDR was infuriated by this attitude of semi-opposition which did not declare itself openly, and extracted its revenge after the 1968 elections by using its parliamentary majority to remove Giscard from the presidency of the finance commission. He was replaced by the UDR member Jean Taittinger. As an act of solidarity towards their leader, the independent republicans refused to sit in the bureaux of the commissions. There was thus a widening gap between the Gaullists and the Moderates who had supported them since 1962. The discontent of Giscard and his friends had no impact on the National Assembly where the UDR had an overall majority; but as the referendum approached, things were different in the country.

There remained within the majority, the delicate problem posed by Georges Pompidou, and his relations with de Gaulle. While still prime minister, Pompidou had already been wounded in May 1968 by not being kept informed of de Gaulle's trip to Baden Baden; and he was not at all convinced of the latter's good faith in the comedy of dupes that had accompanied his departure from office in June. The influence of the 'deputy for Cantal' remained considerable within the UDR, which created for him the post of honorary president of its parliamentary group in the



National Assembly. He became the UDR's moral leader, all the more so in that he barely concealed his doubts about his successor and the policy he was carrying out. As a result, the UDR deputies came to regard Pompidou as a possible recourse against the policy of participation which they regarded, with distaste, as much too reformist-minded. Voted in by a conservative electorate to prevent upheavals, they were bound to be uneasy at de Gaulle's ambition to use the law to make deep-seated changes to French society. Many looked nostalgically at Pompidou whom they regarded, rightly or wrongly, as being in agreement with their own values. Nostalgia became hope when they recalled the 'national destiny' that de Gaulle had promised for his former prime minister.

Moreover a whole series of events combined to make Pompidou, the moral leader of a majority that regarded him as de Gaulle's successor, ever more determined to enter into his inheritance. First came the Marcovic Affair, a sordid gangland settling of accounts in which there was an attempt, by way of rumour and faked photographs, to compromise Pompidou and his wife. Marcovic, the dead man, acted as bodyguard to the actor Alain Delon, who turned out to be a friend of the Pompidous. The latter regarded the whole thing as a plot set up by the secret services to destroy his presidential ambitions, and he believed further that the instigators were close to the government. Most of all he was outraged that his successor, Couve de Murville, had not lifted a finger to stop what was being planned and, even worse, had deliberately allowed his collaborators to go around spreading slanderous allegations about him. He was also profoundly hurt that de Gaulle had adopted a stance of philosophical resignation in the face of the attacks launched on his former prime minister and had not uttered the words which would have killed the 'plot' dead in its tracks.

It was after the Marcovic Affair that the events occurred which would turn Pompidou, so far as public opinion was concerned, into de Gaulle's objective rival. While visiting Rome, he told a group of journalists that he would be a candidate for the presidency when the time came for an election, adding immediately, 'I am not in any hurry.' The declaration merely confirmed what everyone knew; but the Agence France Presse telegram, reporting it as an official declaration of his candidature, caused a considerable stir in France. There followed a terse communiqué from the Elysée on 22 January stressing that the president intended to complete his mandate; Pompidou's clarification in Geneva on 13 February, which actually made his intentions much vaguer but confirmed their essence (that he would be candidate); and finally an Elysée dinner designed to show the continuing closeness between de Gaulle and his former prime minister. Yet nothing could stop many members of the Majority from receiving the clear message that Georges Pompidou, whose firmness and political skill they had admired in May and June 1968, and whose governmental experience



Table 27. *Evolution of voting intentions during the campaign for the April 1969 referendum*

Voting Intention	1st poll 18–23 April	2nd poll 1–7 April	3rd poll 14–17 April	4th poll 23–24 April	5th poll 26 April
Yes	51	52	52	49	46.5
No	49	48	48	51	53.5
Definite voting intention	47	48	56	78	84

Source: IFOP (33), p. 242.

was well known, was ready to assume the succession should de Gaulle decide to withdraw. The fear of the unknown, the prospect of chaos, had been the ultimate weapon in de Gaulle's armoury throughout all the electoral consultations of the Fifth Republic; on the eve of the 1969 referendum the weapon ceased to work.

The result of the referendum was to be determined by this cocktail of discontents, oppositions, disappointments and personal grudges.

### *The end of de Gaulle's Republic*

The referendum campaign began in very difficult circumstances for de Gaulle who had to face, as in 1962, the opposition of all the political parties. The Left naturally advocated a 'no' vote, making its principal argument the constitutional violation produced by the quasi-abolition of the Senate. It was joined in its opposition by the former supporters of French Algeria who, like Jacques Soustelle, used the occasion to settle their account with the president. The opposition centrists were united in their hostility to the project with the governmentals like Jacques Duhamel joining, though not without hesitation, the more determined adversaries around Lecanuet. The most effective centrist campaigner – and one who came to acquire a starring role – was Alain Poher, the Senate president. He impressed by the determination and moderation of his arguments and attracted the support of a great number of senators. Behind them marched the huge mass of local councillors, people who were particularly influential in the rural areas and small towns where modernisation had produced a malaise among the peasant farmers, the shopkeepers and the artisans. This was the group that abandoned the government for the opposition. And finally, crossing the bridge that led from latent to open opposition, Giscard d'Estaing recommended a 'no' vote. (In this he was not followed by all the leaders of his party – the Interior Minister, Raymond Marcellin, supported



Table 28. 27 April 1969 referendum

		% electorate	% vote
Electorate	28,655,692	100	
Votes	23,093,296		
Abstentions	5,562,396	19.4	
Spoilt papers	635,678	2.2	
Yes	10,312,469	36.7	46.82
No	11,945,149	41.6	53.18

the referendum proposal.) Faced with a coalition that resembled the 'cartel of noes', de Gaulle was entitled to hope that, as in 1962, universal suffrage would prefer him to the parties. Yet there were significant differences between the two elections. The 1969 project was vague, unexciting and its objectives were unclear; it did not, and could not, have the mobilising quality of the 1962 referendum.

Even the campaign of the UDR, the only political force to recommend a 'yes' vote, was double edged. Pompidou played his part and loyally spoke in favour of the project. Yet his loyalty did not extend, as Malraux tried in vain to persuade him, to declaring that he would not be a candidate for the presidency should de Gaulle step down. Moreover, the reappearance centre stage of the former prime minister gave him a double benefit – it brought him back to the attention of the French electorate (and reminded them that he was ready to succeed de Gaulle) at the same time as it enabled him to play the role of loyal, and straightforward, Gaullist.

There were also the unfavourable findings that the opinion polls began to register as the campaign developed. For a month they gave a narrow majority (51–2 per cent) to the 'yes' vote – but at a time when virtually half the electorate still had to make up its mind. Things fell apart in the last few days of the campaign: a substantial number of the hesitants decided to join the 'no' cause in the days and hours that preceded the vote. It would not be unreasonable to say that this section of the electorate, having briefly been reluctant to cast a negative vote through fear of a leap in the dark, decided in the end to take the plunge once it became convinced that the risk was limited by the likely succession of a capable, and tested, figure. Whatever the explanation, the final polls showed that the 'no' voters were in a majority. However little he may have wanted it, Pompidou thus appears to have been one of the principal authors of de Gaulle's defeat.

The official results of 27 April conformed that fact of defeat, and their analysis shows just how comprehensive it was. Seventy-one departments voted 'no' against twenty-four who voted 'yes'. The geographical distribution of the vote shows that the 'yes' vote was concentrated in the areas

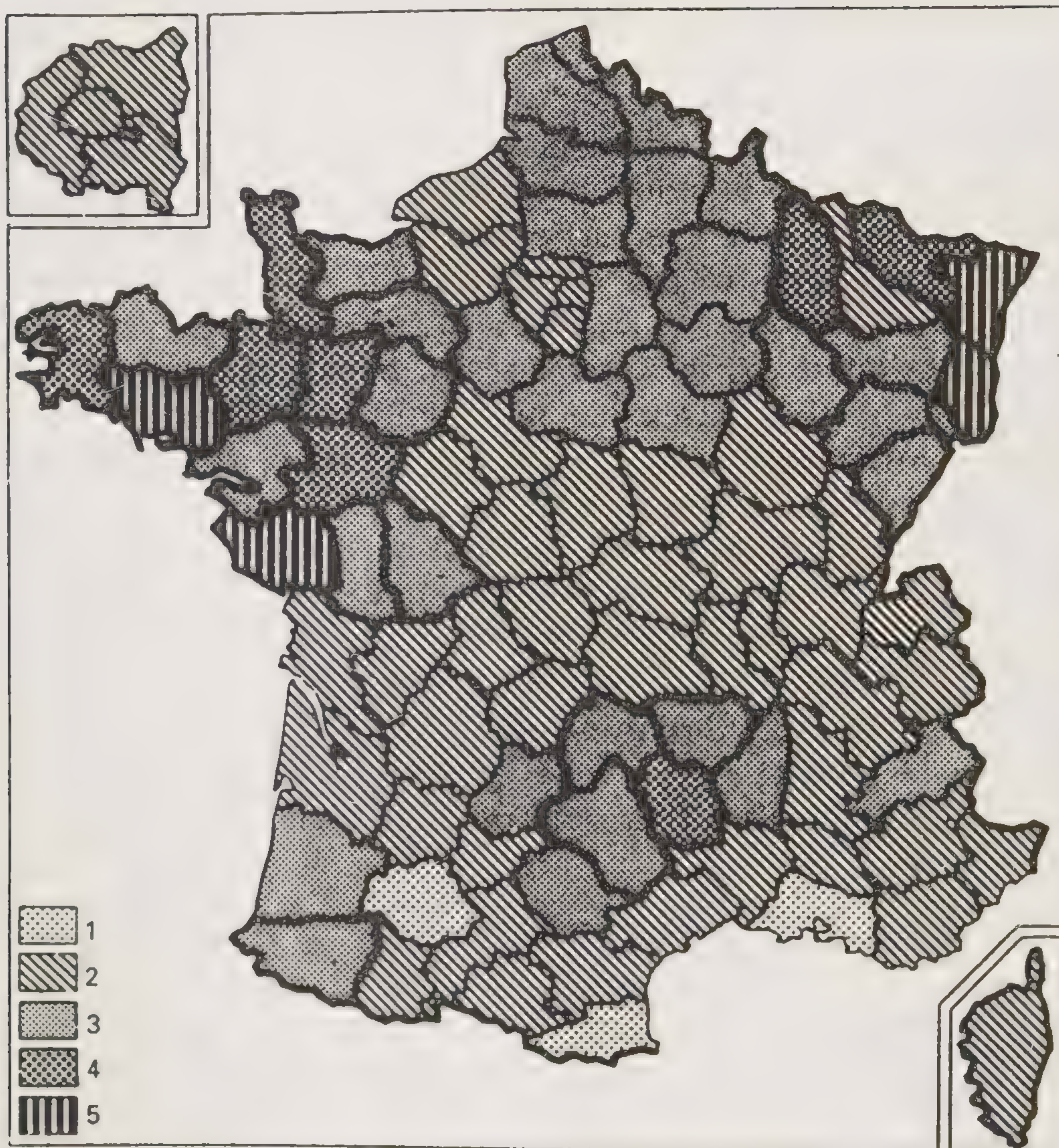


Table 29. *Distribution of voting intentions in the 27 April 1969 referendum according to social categories*

Voting intentions in pre-election polls 1, 3, 4 and 5 compared with round two of the 1965 presidential election and the 'yes' vote in the 28 October 1962 referendum

	'Yes' October 1962	de Gaulle 19 Decem- ber 1965	'Yes' polls 1 and 3	'Yes' polls 4 and 5	'No' polls 4 and 5
Total population	63	55	52	48	52
Men	57	48	46	43	57
Women	70	62	60	53	47
Age					
20-34	65	49	43	43	57
35-49	60	54	52	44	56
50-64	63	55	52	48	52
65 plus	66	64	62	60	40
Profession of head of household					
Farming	71	60	62	58	42
Industry and commerce	47	67	46	46	54
Higher executive and liberal professions	62	60	39		
Employee	56	53	50	47	53
Worker	61	45	45	38	62
Non-working	65	60	60	59	41
Residence					
Rural communes	69	58	60	56	44
Towns under 20,000 inhabitants	72	50	52	44	56
20,000-100,000 inhabitants	57	50	59	46	54
Over 100,000 inhabitants	60	55	47	47	53
Paris agglomeration	55	53	40	39	61
Political preference					
PCF			5	5	95
FGDS			16	15	85
PDM			41	38	62
Independent republicans			74	75	25
UDV (Gaullists)			84	84	16





Map 8 'Yes' votes in 27 April 1969 referendum

Percentage of electorate

(1) 24–29.9 (2) 30–35.9 (3) 36–41.9 (4) 42–47.9 (5) 48–51.34

Source: F. Goguel, *Chroniques électorales*, Presses de la FNSP, 1983, vol. III, p. 16

where Gaullism had done best in the first round of the 1965 elections. But it also shows significant declines in the pro-de Gaulle majorities (especially in the bastions of the North, East and West), thus providing further proof that the most right-wing elements in de Gaulle's electorate had partially accepted the idea that he should go. Yet political scientists have shown that this fact, for all its significance, was not enough to cause de Gaulle's defeat, and that the decisive 'no' votes were cast by the centrists and by the moderate liberals behind Giscard d'Estaing. Sociologically, the largest



shifts to the opposition came from farmers, shopkeepers and cadres. De Gaulle's defeat was undoubtedly due to the coalition of social and political discontent.

For de Gaulle himself the lesson of the vote was clear. Judging that he had been rejected by the universal suffrage which he had always regarded as the only source of his power, he published in the first minutes of 28 April a communiqué which had been drawn up on the 26th. 'I cease to exercise the functions of president of the Republic. This decision takes effect at midday today.'

On 28 April, as de Gaulle retreated at Colombey into an official silence which was to last until his death in November 1970, his successor, Alain Poher, entered the Elysée to exercise the presidential interim provided for in the constitution. He no doubt savoured the historical irony of finding himself installed in an office of which it had been one of the objectives of the failed referendum to deprive him.

De Gaulle's Republic ended in the dramatic circumstances that accorded well with the atmosphere of drama which had characterised the whole of its turbulent history. It was an atmosphere in which de Gaulle had always revelled; only when confronting the storm did he feel at peace with himself.



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## Conclusion: Charles de Gaulle and France's entry into modernity

Is it possible for the historian, at the end of this survey, to evaluate the contribution of the eleven years of de Gaulle's Republic to contemporary France? What makes the task dangerous is not the relative proximity of the events, but rather the fact that over the years a golden legend has been created. The legend, first woven by de Gaulle's admirers but then gradually accepted into the consciousness of virtually all French people, is that of the extraordinary individual who saved France's honour in 1940; liberated the national territory in 1944; managed to rescue France from the errors, which he had denounced, of the Fourth Republic; and then provided her with stable institutions, international status, economic prosperity and social progress. It is an image of France which, leaving aside a number of warts, does indeed convey the reality of the 1960s, even if the French were not always – as opinion polls show – aware of it. The question then remains, how much of this achievement was the work of de Gaulle and his governments and how much should be attributed to international developments in which France, like the other industrialised nations, participated?

Comparison of the histories of the Fourth and Fifth Republics is one good way to approach the question. It shows that at the broadest level, there was an obvious continuity between the two regimes. Throughout the whole period 1945–69, France ceased to play the world role that had been hers before 1939 and found herself obliged to choose between the super-powers who dominated the new, post-war world. France's geopolitical situation, her history, her values and her civilisation all naturally led her to become part of the Western community organised around the United States: economic ties, membership of the Atlantic Alliance, support for the United States at moments of crisis (Berlin or Cuba) provide ample proof of this. Yet neither in the Fourth nor the Fifth Republics did France agree to become a mere pawn of America. To regain her influence over a pacified and no longer fragmented continent, the country decided, during the Fourth Republic, to embark on the construction of a Europe whose supranational character reflected ambitions that went beyond the merely economic. It was in order not to be overtaken in technology and to have the



capability to acquire the ultimate, nuclear weapon that the Fourth Republic entered into atomic research and decided to develop an atom bomb. The role of the Fifth Republic was to develop and extend the initiatives of its predecessor by giving France an operational nuclear force and by putting into effect the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Is it correct to argue that henceforth the construction of Europe was to be based on nation-states and that supranationalism ceased to exist? It is difficult to claim that a government preserves the absolutes of its sovereignty when it agrees, as France and the other EEC states did, to fix its agricultural prices in agreement with its partners – and under the aegis of a European authority.

The same continuities in international politics are evident in the sphere of decolonisation. The Fourth Republic had been poorly prepared for the nationalist hurricane that struck it in 1946, and its history was profoundly affected by the innumerable conflicts that occurred throughout the empire and by the two colonial wars in Indo-China and Algeria, the second of which was to destroy the regime. Yet between 1954 and 1956 it drew the consequences of what many of its leaders regarded as an ineluctable evolution – the withdrawal from Indo-China, the granting of independence to Tunisia and Morocco, and the preparations for the evolution of the African colonies through the Defferre law all showed how far France had moved towards decolonisation. The Fifth Republic would complete the process in giving independence to the states of black Africa and in ending the Algerian war. Yet the conditions in which the latter occurred were hardly any better than those that accompanied Indo-China's independence; the cost of peace was the massive exodus from Algeria of the European population, and the advantages gained by France in the Evian agreement disappeared within a few years.

The theme of continuity also dominates in economic growth. After the gigantic effort of economic reconstruction carried out by the Fourth Republic, France entered into her age of growth in 1953–4. From this time on – with occasional short-term hiccups – the annual production of goods and services grew regularly, so that the eleven years of de Gaulle's Republic fit comfortably into the overall period of growth that started in the Fourth Republic and continued in the Pompidou presidency of 1969–74. Throughout the period, the engine of growth was provided by consumer industries. Heavy industry, once reconstruction was completed, rapidly ran out of steam, and agriculture was unable to match the growth rate of the more successful industrial sectors. Continuity is evident, once again, in the difficulties that this growth experienced. Both the Fourth and the Fifth Republics came up against the permanent problems of endemic inflation and regional imbalances, the latter requiring the implementation of regional development policies. It should be noted, however, that whereas the Fourth Republic experienced deficits on its current balance of



accounts, the Fifth Republic was in surplus. Continuous economic growth naturally led to continuities in social change. The fundamental changes in social structure and lifestyles that we have observed in de Gaulle's Republic actually started in the early 1950s: an urbanisation which steadily obliterated the traces of rural society and mentalities; the progressive disappearance of the independent 'small men' who had been the social cement of the Third Republic and remained the dominant group in 1945; the expansion of the salaried middle class. A new France now began to enjoy increased living standards whose indicators were the car, electrical household goods, improved health and the birth of a leisure society. Such spectacular social transformation necessarily produced its own tensions and difficulties. The social categories who found themselves marginalised responded with angry protests; the Poujadist agitation of the Fourth Republic had its counterpart in the Fifth in the farmers' barricades of the early 1960s and the protest movement headed by Gerard Nicoud at the end of our period. The unequal distribution of the fruits of growth led to strikes and sectoral protests. Most important of all, French society was taken by surprise by the unexpected nature of the social consequences of economic growth and was unable to develop the ideas and the values that would enable the on-going changes to be understood, to be controlled and then to be integrated into existing social practice. This failure was the cause of the permanent social malaise, marked by the ceaseless search for an (imprecise) 'elsewhere' or an 'alternative' that characterised the 1960s, a period which, since the rupture of 1974, has come to be regarded as a golden age.

Are we then to conclude that the constraints imposed by the movements of world history make it impossible to regard de Gaulle's Republic as having any specificity (aside from the ephemera of politics) and that there was absolute continuity between the Fourth and Fifth Republics? Such a conclusion would be exaggerated and therefore wrong; national political adaptation to the necessities of overall global evolution does not render the role of governments irrelevant. Yet it is important to be clear what that role is.

Thus we need to try to define the exact role of Gaullism in the years 1958–69. And this in turn raises the question of how to define Gaullism. Gaullism cannot be viewed as a political doctrine since we have seen that it was above all a pragmatic method of exercising power. Yet the pragmatism was dominated by an essence – that 'certain idea of France' with which de Gaulle began his *Mémoires de Guerre*. France was a reality that could not be subsumed into any other entity. It was imperative that in all circumstances her interests should prevail, her voice should be heard and respected – in other words that her destiny should be guaranteed. Her destiny was more important than that of any individual group, since each group was only a part of the whole. Since this conception of France as a mystical entity



coincided, paradoxically, with a coldly realistic analysis of the geopolitical order, the Gaullist exercise of power consisted in using the ineluctable constraints we have referred to above to attempt to realise a strategy that would give the country room for manoeuvre within a predetermined global structure.

De Gaulle's contribution to national history lay initially – and perhaps primarily – in the creation of institutions that gave France the stability she had lacked in the Fourth Republic, restored her reputation in the world, and determined the other elements of national policy. It was the institutional order that enabled de Gaulle, without leaving the Western Alliance, to affirm his autonomy and his wish to be treated as a partner by withdrawing from the NATO command structure, attempting to establish direct relations with the East, criticising American policy and presenting himself as the defender of the Third World, of small nations and of national independence. It was the institutional order too which enabled him to put an end to the Algerian war while avoiding, if not crises, then at least the collapse which the Fourth Republic had experienced. France owes to the Fifth Republic the relatively well-ordered management of growth through the series of plans which progressively modified economic structures. State control steadily gave way to a more ready acknowledgement of market mechanisms and there were, also, less successful attempts at regional economic development. It was, finally, institutional stability that, despite exceptions, problems and social crises both limited (the 1963 miners' strike) and generalised (1968), enabled social cohesion to continue. The gigantic social changes of the 1960s were navigated without too much difficulty. In sum, de Gaulle left behind him at the moment of his departure – the crisis of May 1968 notwithstanding – a modernised France and one that was much better integrated into the new world of the late 1960s than she had been when he returned to power in 1958.

It is no criticism of his achievement to say that de Gaulle did not succeed in the impossible task of making France the equal of the two superpowers; that he did not single-handedly create economic prosperity or manage to obtain overall social peace; and that what makes him the greatest figure in twentieth-century French history was his ability to negotiate his country's adaptation to modernity. Beyond doubt his greatest achievement of all was to have succeeded, through the matchless use of language by which he could turn the prosaic into the heroic, in convincing his fellow citizens that what was often no more than unavoidable necessity was actually the brilliant triumph of will and ability. Given that politics is essentially the art of the possible, it was no mean feat to have succeeded in giving a people back its pride in itself through words that transformed the base metal of reality into the gold of legend.



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# Index

Abbane (Ramadane), 32  
 Abbas (Ferhat), 32, 44, 51  
 Abelin (Pierre), 208, 234  
 Adenauer (Konrad), 170, 175, 176  
 Ailleret (Colonel Charles), 167, 169  
 Alduy (Paul), 7, 14  
 Alleg (Henri), 46  
 Anthony (Richard), 129  
 Argoud (Colonel Antoine), 39, 49  
 Armand (Louis), 108, 195  
 Arrighi (Pascal), 40, 64  
 Audin (Maurice), 46  
 Auriol (Vincent), 26

Bacon (Paul), 4, 24, 26, 37, 70  
 Baille (Mê), 38  
 Barbu (Marcel), 194, 201  
 Baumbartner (Wilfrid), 107  
 Baumel (Jacques), 20, 64, 88  
 Bayet (Albert), 40, 46  
 Baylet (Jean), 13, 66  
 Béghin (family), 141  
 Belleville (Pierre), 137  
 Ben Bella, 43  
 Ben Khedda (Ben Youssef), 71  
 Ben Yahia (Mohammed), 44  
 Berthoin (Jean), 4, 12, 26, 66  
 Biaggi (Jean-Baptiste), 40  
 Bidault (Georges), 13, 19, 20, 40, 46, 53, 66, 224  
 Bidegain (Jose), 192  
 Billières (René), 94, 99, 194  
 Billotte (General Pierre), 4  
 Birnbaum (Pierre), 142, 143  
 Bloch-Laine (François), 103  
 Boegner (Jean-Marc), 5, 59  
 Boisseu (Colonel de), 71  
 Bonaparte (Louis-Napoleon), 72  
 Bonnefous (Edouard), 98  
 Bosch (Juan), 179  
 Bouallem (Bachaga), 45  
 Boulloche (André), 5, 26, 37

Boumendjel (Me), 44  
 Bourdet (Claude), 14, 65  
 Bourgès-Maunory (Maurice), 24, 46  
 Boussac (family), 141  
 Broglie (Jean de), 70  
 Broizat (Colonel), 49  
 Brouillet (René), 29, 59  
 Brown (George), 173  
 Bruguière (Michel), 231  
 Burin des Rozières (Etienne), 84, 118  
 Buron (Robert), 26, 41, 49, 70

Capitant (René), 64, 223, 228  
 Casanova (Laurent), 65, 92  
 Cassin (René), 6, 25, 72  
 Castro (Fidel), 214  
 Catroux (General Georges), 4  
 Cerny (Philip G.), 153  
 Chaban-Delmas (Jacques), 4, 14, 19, 25, 59, 60, 89  
 Chaing Kai Shek, 179  
 Chalandon (Albin), 19, 59, 64, 87, 88, 89  
 Challe (General Maurice), 35, 42, 45, 49, 50  
 Chassin (General), 67  
 Chateaubriand (François-René de), 172  
 Chatelet (Albert), 25  
 Chenot (Bernard), 26  
 Claude (Henri), 92  
 Claudius-Petit (Eugène), 99  
 Clavel (Maurice), 99  
 Clemenceau (Georges), 12  
 Cohn-Bendit (Daniel), 214  
 Cornut-Gentile (Bernard), 26, 37, 41, 61  
 Coste-Floret (Paul), 7, 46  
 Coty (René), 3, 8, 25, 26  
 Courcel (Geoffroy de), 59  
 Couve de Murville (Maurice), 5, 26, 43, 69, 85, 86, 174, 209, 228, 233, 236  
 Crépin (General Jean), 42, 45, 47  
 Crespin, 38

Daladier (Edouard), 24  
 Dalou (Jules), 11



- Dante (Dante Alighieri), 172  
 David (Jean-Paul), 193  
 Debatisse (Michel), 133, 190  
 Debré (Michel), 4, 7, 19, 21, 26, 29, 36, 37, 40, 41, 43, 47, 50, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 84, 85, 86, 89, 107, 112, 118, 133, 158, 202, 203, 222, 228, 234  
 Defferre (Gaston), 13, 24, 27, 28, 66, 93, 96, 97, 98, 192, 193, 194, 195, 243  
 Delbecque (Léon), 20, 33, 40, 64  
 Delon (Alain), 236  
 Delors (Jacques), 139  
 Delouvrier (Paul), 35, 41, 42, 47  
 Denoix de Saint-Marc (Elie), 49  
 Depreux (Edouard), 13, 95  
 Descamps (Eugène), 140  
 Domenach (Jean-Marie), 96  
 Droit (Michel), 201  
 Duchet (Roger), 20, 40, 48, 67  
 Duclos (Jacques), 27  
 Duhamel (Jacques), 98, 208, 226, 234, 237  
 Duprat (François), 90  
 Dussaulx (Roger), 88  
 Duverger (Maurice), 21, 24, 72, 96  
  
 Eisenhower (Dwight), 36, 167, 179  
 Ely (General Paul), 42  
 Erhard (Ludwig), 177  
  
 Fares (Abderhamane), 54  
 Faure (Edgar), 13, 24, 27, 116, 179, 202, 229, 230, 231  
 Faure (Maurice), 94, 97, 98, 99, 205  
 Fauvet (Jacques), 8, 21  
 Ferniot (Jean), 191, 192  
 Filipacchi (Daniel), 128  
 Foccart (Jacques), 5, 19, 59, 159  
 Fontanet (Joseph), 70, 98, 234  
 Fouchet (Christian), 4, 54, 171, 223  
 Fournier (Marcel), 110  
 Fourquet (General Michel), 5  
 Frachon (Benoit), 138  
 Freud (Sigmund), 212  
 Frey (Roger), 7, 19, 20, 26, 64, 88, 89  
  
 Gaillard (Felix), 13, 94, 103  
 Gambetta (Leon), 12  
 Gambiez (General Fernand), 47, 49  
 Garaudy (Roger), 93  
 Gardes (Colonel), 39, 49, 51  
 Gardy (General), 52  
 Gazier (Albert), 66  
 Gingembre (Leon), 135  
 Giscard d'Estaing (Valéry), 67, 70, 80, 91, 107, 119, 202, 203, 209, 235, 237, 240  
 Godard (Colonel), 49, 52  
 Goethe (Wolfgang), 172  
 Goetze (Roger), 5  
 Goguel (François), 221  
 Gomulka (Wladyslaw), 178  
 Gorse (George), 223  
 Goutailler, 38  
 Grandval (Gilbert), 64  
 Grappin, 215  
 Gregoire (R.), 138  
 Guichard (Olivier), 5, 19, 59, 117, 228  
 Guillaumat (Pierre), 5, 26, 34, 37, 61, 167  
  
 Hallstein (Walter), 174  
 Hallyday (Johnny), 129  
 Hamon (Léo), 64  
 Hernu (Charles), 97  
 Houdet (Roger), 26  
 Houphouët-Boigny (Felix), 4, 6, 26, 156, 157, 158  
 Huvelin (Paul), 142, 218  
  
 Jacquinet (Louis), 4, 6, 26, 33, 70  
 Janot (Raymond), 5, 7, 59  
 Jaurès (Jean), 12  
 Jeanneney (Jean-Marcel), 26, 37, 41, 61, 107, 159, 202, 223, 229, 231, 235  
 Johnson (Lyndon), 163, 164, 179  
 Jouhard (General Edmond), 49, 50, 52, 56, 70  
 Joxe (Louis), 41, 47, 51, 69, 223  
 Juin (Marshal Alphonse), 48  
  
 Keita (Modibo), 158  
 Kennedy (John Fitzgerald), 108, 162, 163, 164, 173, 176, 179, 191  
 Khrushchev (Nikita), 92, 163, 178  
 Koenig (General Marie-Pierre), 4  
 Krivine (Alain), 214  
  
 Lacheroy (Colonel), 34, 39, 49  
 Lacoste (Robert), 24, 40, 46  
 Lafay (Bernard), 98  
 Laffont (Pierre), 36  
 Lagailarde (Pierre), 38, 41  
 Laniel (Joseph), 3, 24  
 Lattre (André de), 59  
 Laurent (Augustin), 93  
 Le Troquer (André), 24  
 Lecanuet (Jean), 98, 99, 100, 195, 196, 197, 199, 200, 201-8, 234, 237  
 Lecourt (Robert), 26  
 Lefèvre (Dr Bernard), 38  
 Lejeune (Max), 33, 40  
 Lefranc (Pierre), 5, 19, 59  
 Lelong (Pierre), 59  
 Leusse (Bruno de), 51  
 Lévêque (Jean-Maxime), 118  
 Lipkowski (Jean de), 14  
 Longuet (Gerard), 90



- Luns (Joseph), 172  
 Lyautey (Philippe), 12
- M'ba (Leon), 159  
 Macmillan (Harold), 173  
 Madelin (Alain), 90  
 Maillet (Serge), 137  
 Malraux (André), 4, 12, 19, 26, 35, 41, 53, 69, 78, 88, 92, 222, 228, 238  
 Malterre (André), 145  
 Mao Tse-tung, 214  
 Marcellin (Raymond), 70, 223, 228, 257  
 Marcilhacy (Pierre), 193, 194, 201  
 Marcuse (Herbert), 212  
 Marette (Jacques), 20  
 Markovic (Affair), 236  
 Marrane (Georges), 25  
 Martel (Robert), 38, 52  
 Martin (Roger), 141  
 Martinet (Gilles), 14, 65  
 Marx (Karl), 212  
 Masse (Pierre), 139  
 Massu (General Jacques), 41, 42, 221  
 Mathon (Colonel), 44  
 Mauriac (François), 22  
 Mauroy (François), 94  
 Mayer (Daniel), 13, 14, 95  
 Mendès France (Pierre), 5, 13, 14, 20, 24, 65, 78, 95, 96, 106, 116, 167, 187, 194, 202, 205, 208, 218, 220  
 Messali Hadj (Ahmad), 51  
 Messmer (Pierre), 61, 69, 86, 209  
 Michelet (Edmond), 4, 19, 26, 29, 34, 89  
 Michelin (family), 141  
 Missoffe (François), 223  
 Mitterrand (François), 14, 24, 27, 65, 80, 93, 94, 97, 98, 100, 194-7, 200-2, 204-6, 208, 220, 234  
 Moch (Jules), 24  
 Mollet (Guy), 3, 4, 6, 8, 13, 24, 33, 34, 66, 78, 94, 97, 194, 204  
 Monnet (Jean), 70, 72, 73, 170, 177, 233  
 Morandat (Yvon), 14  
 Morazé (Charles), 5  
 Morice (André), 13, 20, 98  
 Morin (General Jean), 47, 49  
 Motchane (Didier), 94  
 Motte (Bernard), 78
- Nasser (Gamal Abdel), 181  
 Naudet (Pierre), 25  
 Nicoud (Gerard), 121, 135, 234, 244  
 Noël (Leon), 7, 72
- Ortiz (Joseph), 41  
 Ortoli (François-Xavier), 223, 228, 234
- Palewski (Gaston), 4  
 Parodi (Alexandre), 72  
 Pasteur Vallery-Radot (Louis), 14  
 Pearson (Lester), 180  
 Pelletier (Etienne), 5  
 Perec (Georges), 148  
 Peyrefitte (Alain), 223  
 Pflimlin (Pierre), 4, 6, 69, 70  
 Philip (André), 95  
 Pinay (Antoine), 3, 4, 26, 40, 61, 67, 91, 99, 103, 104, 107, 118, 171, 193, 195  
 Pineau (Christian), 24  
 Pisani (Edgard), 133, 203, 208  
 Pleven (René), 14, 80, 99, 167, 223  
 Poher (Alain), 233, 237  
 Poincaré (Raymond), 103  
 Pompidou (Georges), 5, 25, 51, 68-71, 73, 84-6, 88-91, 107, 118, 119, 123, 133, 139, 165, 202, 203, 205, 209, 215, 218, 219, 231, 235, 236, 238, 243  
 Poperen (Jean), 65, 95  
 Poujade (Pierre), 14, 23  
 Poujade (Robert), 88
- Queuille (Henri), 3, 12
- Rey (Jean), 174  
 Reynaud (Paul), 7, 25, 48, 67, 73, 78, 91  
 Richard (General Jacques), 19, 87, 88  
 Rivet (Paul), 40  
 Rocard (Michel), 96  
 Roche (Emile), 195  
 Roux (Ambroise), 141  
 Rueff (Jacques), 103, 104, 108, 118, 166, 171
- Sainteny (Jean), 14  
 Salan (General Raoul), 33-5, 48-50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 70, 223  
 Say (family), 141  
 Schneider (family), 141  
 Schroder (Gerhard), 176  
 Schuman (Robert), 170, 177  
 Schumann (Maurice), 66, 69, 70, 78, 228  
 Séguy (Georges), 138, 219  
 Senghor (Leopold Sedar), 157, 158  
 Servan-Schreiber (Jean-Jacques), 96, 165, 192  
 Servet (Michel), *see* Rocard (Michel)  
 Servin (Marcel), 65, 92  
 Si Salah (Zamon Mohammed), 44  
 Soustelle (Jacques), 4, 5, 14, 15, 19, 29, 31, 33, 37, 40-2, 46, 48, 59, 61, 64, 87, 224, 237  
 Soutou (Jean-Marie), 171  
 Spaak (Paul-Henri), 170, 172  
 Stalin (Joseph), 32



Sudreau (Pierre), 26, 37, 41, 69, 195

Suffert (Georges), 192

Susini (Jean-Jacques), 52, 56

Taittinger (Jean), 235

Teitgen (Pierre-Henri), 7, 24

Terrenoire (Louis), 29, 88, 89

Thomazo (Colonel), 40, 89

Thorez (Maurice), 65, 92, 93

Tixier-Vignancour (Jean-Louis), 193, 196,  
201

Tombalbaye (François), 159

Touré (Sekou), 156, 158

Tournoux (Raymond), 336

Toutée, 198

Triboulet (Raymond), 26, 42

Tricot (Bernard), 5, 29, 44, 59, 227

Trinquier (Colonel), 39

Tsiranana (Philibert), 7, 158

Uri (Pierre), 70, 71

Vallon (Louis), 64

Vartan (Sylvie), 129

Vedel (Georges), 72, 112

Venner (Dominique), 90

Verdier (Robert), 13

Vezinet (General Adolphe), 49

Viansson-Ponté (Pierre), 30

Villiers (George), 142

Violette (Maurice), 40

Waldeck-Rochet, 93

Wendel (family), 141

Wilson (Harold), 173

Youlou (*Abbé* Fulbert), 156

Zeller (General André), 49, 50

























































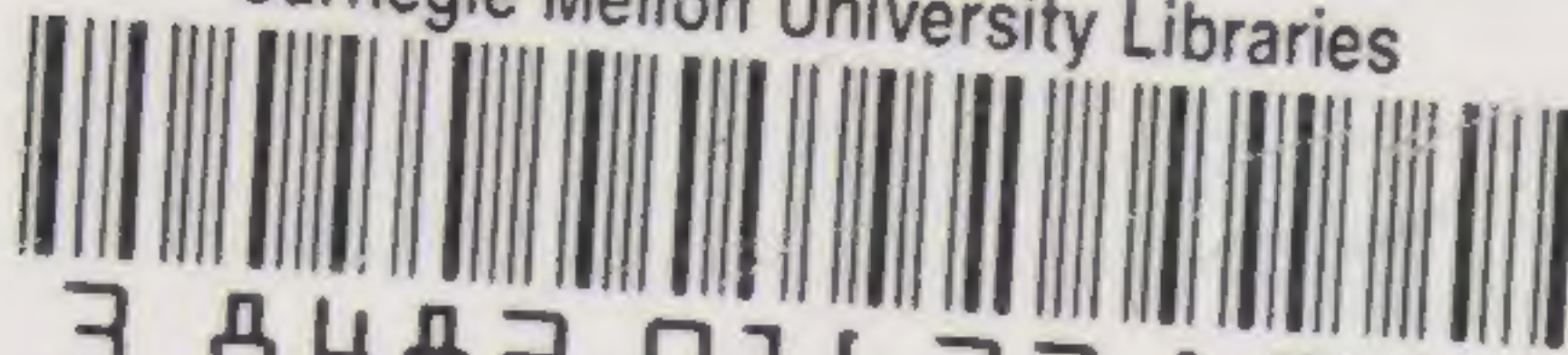






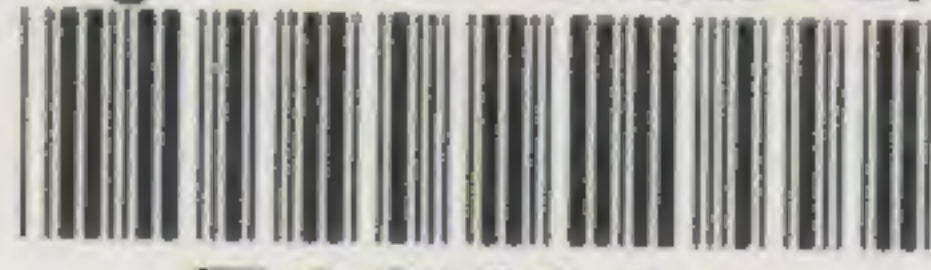
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*The Republic of de Gaulle* offers a comprehensive account – the fullest yet available in English – of the eleven years that followed the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958. Serge Bernstein analyses the new constitutional and political system that emerged under de Gaulle, and shows how France was able to disengage from the ruinous Algerian war. He then conducts a detailed analysis of the socio-economic changes wrought during this period, and discusses the ambitions, achievements and failures of de Gaulle's highly individualistic foreign policy. In the final section, Professor Bernstein traces the decline of de Gaulle's ascendancy, from the election of 1965 to his eventual resignation in 1969. A separate chapter is devoted to the momentous events of 1968, which are located within the overall context of French politics and society during this period. In conclusion, the author assesses the contribution of a remarkable political leader to the no less remarkable changes that took place in France during his presidency.

This volume, the eighth to appear in *The Cambridge History of Modern France*, is lucidly translated by Peter Morris, and is complete with a chronology and English-language bibliography.

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